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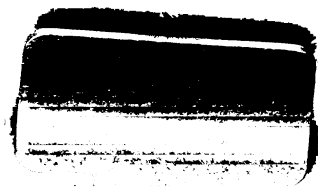
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**IN THE WAKE OF THE
GREEN BANNER**







They sat down in the shade of a tamarisk

IN THE WAKE OF THE GREEN BANNER

BY
EUGENE PAUL METOUR

ILLUSTRATED BY E. M. ASHE



NEW YORK
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS
1909

GENERAL

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To My Father

In memory of the Ouaransenis and of those happy years in the Beni-Chougran mountains; to remind him of my first impression of color: the purple mass of the Djebel Antar, yet in the light, while the redoubt at its feet had already sunk in the blue shade, and the oval, vesper sun, behind the tamarisks, gleaming scarlet through the rose-colored dust.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. THE HOUR OF ISLAM	1
II. A BERBER OF THE ATLAS	14
III. "THE HORSE THAT GOES TOWARDS SUNSET" .	28
IV. RUNNING THE GAUNTLET OF SENUSSIYA . .	40
V. IN THE IMPERIAL GARDENS	56
VI. GAZI	65
VII. IN THE WILDS OF THE ADRAR	89
VIII. THE LIONS OF TILIMSA	107
IX. THE OASIS	117
X. AT THE FOOT OF THE KASBAH	132
XI. WITH THE CHILDREN OF THE TABLE-LAND .	143
XII. THE GATHERING OF ISLAM	155
XIII. "WHO CAN ACCOUNT FOR A RUMI'S THOUGHTS?" ;	164
XIV. THE PREY THE OASIS SENDS TO THE DESERT .	175
XV. THE VEILED PEOPLE OF THE LANCE . . .	187
XVI. THE FOURTH <i>GALON</i>	204
XVII. DJEÏLMA LETS FALL HER HAÏK	227

CHAPTER	PAGE
XVIII. THE EYE OF THE WAD-EL-HALUF	246
XIX. ABD-ER-RHAMAN-ES-SHERIFF	256
XX. "PARADISE IS UNDER THE SHADOW OF SWORDS"	269
XXI. THE BASTION OF THE WAD-EL-HALUF	289
XXII. THE SORTIE	306
XXIII. HANDS IN THE SALT	316
XXIV. THE HONORS OF WAR	330
XXV. THE ENIGMATICAL CAFARD	347
XXVI. ON THE TAGREMARET ROAD	368
XXVII. THE FARMHOUSE OF AÏN-GUERGOUR	378
XXVIII. THE THOUGHTS OF THE NIGHT-WATCH . .	387
XXIX. A CORSICAN REGULUS	398
XXX. SI-HAMZA REMEMBERS HIS OATH	414
XXXI. "THE PEN THAT WRITES WITHOUT INK" . .	421
XXXII. SIDI-MALIK COMES INTO HIS OWN	436

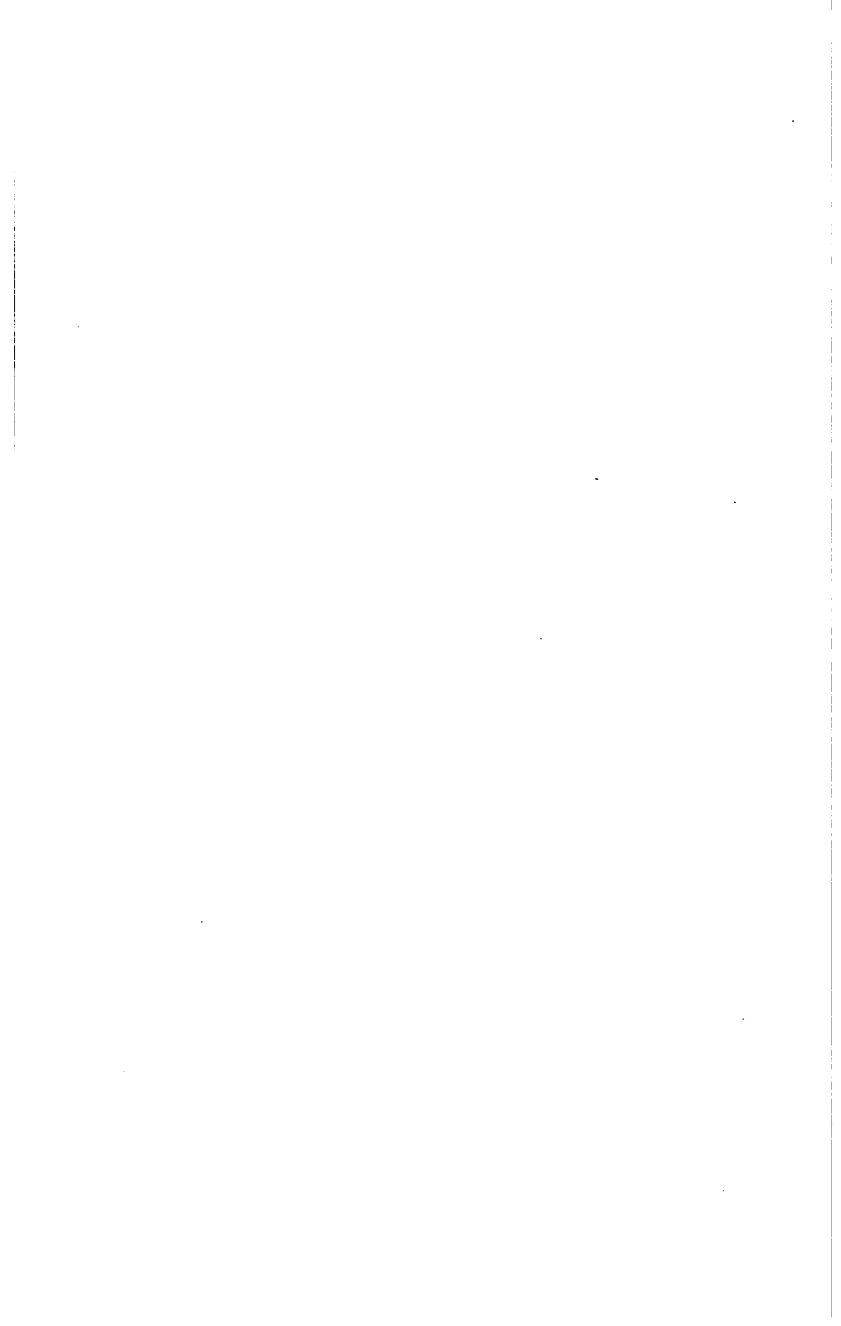
ILLUSTRATIONS

They sat down in the shade of a tamarisk . . Frontispiece

	FACING PAGE
<i>"Aroua mena! Sidi d'Ornano! Sidi Leïtoun! Akh Arbi"</i>	86

Then a sickening weakness stole over him 202

The mad woman, Inshallah! 422





IN THE WAKE OF THE GREEN BANNER

CHAPTER I

THE HOUR OF ISLAM

The room was high and wide. A trefoil-shaped opening faced the door. Through the trefoil the glance swept the European town. A glimpse through the door revealed a Moorish peristyle, a pergola, an Oriental city bathed in the transparencies of late afternoon's atmosphere, and an endless perspective of palm gardens.

There was little light in the solemn apartment. Blue on the limewash of the vaulted ceiling, violet on the pink walls where the arabesques of a whimsical frieze shone with a glitter of molten brass, twilight shadow was the true inmate of the room. A thick Persian rug covered the mosaic. Three onyx steps led to an alcove.

The most conspicuous piece of furniture was a low Moorish bed of red damask and green linen. A large coffer, such as native women use to hoard their jewels and finery, standing close to the wall and covered with a leopard-skin, constituted a very decorative, if not a very comfortable, divan. Upon the rug of old-rose color, near an unlighted *brasero* of mediæval Spanish pattern, a mandolin rested on cushions of brocade and velvet. Near by, a large brass

tray supported an aiguillere. On a small hexagonal stool of ebony, whose mosaic top and shelves shone with inlaid lozenges and arabesques of silver, were tiny coffee-cups. A heavy Moorish lantern of green bronze, carved and chiselled with such skill that it had the effect of lace, hung from the pendentive of the ceiling. The walls were bare. In the corners the shadows were passing through all the changes Arab blues assume in the radiance of dusk.

Lying on the cushions, in the middle of the room, the painter George Leyton remained perfectly still. He almost held his breath, fearful lest a slight noise should dissipate the vapor of his dream. Laden with all the *huerta's* fragrance, a chilly wind entered the apartment. Small tongues of green and blue flames were dancing on top of the charcoal filling the Spanish brasero. At the extremity of its brass chain, its colored prisms of diamond-cut glass throwing at intervals weird flashes on the bare walls and ceiling, the heavy lantern oscillated with the regularity of a pendulum. These lights in movement on the plastering forcibly reminded the painter of an effect of chiaroscuro he had observed, one stormy night, in the hold of a smuggling schooner, and gave him the sensation of being again aboard some vessel. He followed them a moment, dreaming of the old days of Mediterranean pirates, when Ibrahim's swarthy Egyptian sailors, nude to the waist, barefoot, bejewelled and turbaned, cast dice on a caramuzel's deck, losing and winning female slaves kidnapped in Corfu or Patras.

His glance turned to settle again on the gem of which the apartment was the setting. If her race bore some connection to her wearing apparel, she was a Moor. Aureoled

with pale colors, she had, under the green gauze and the frail, transparent silks, the graceful curves, the robust plasticity and small bones of an Ouled-Nail dancing girl. The roses and lilies of her complexion were more puzzling. Her attire was perhaps less Moorish than Algerine; since the Turkish shintiyan of scarlet taffeta, tied at the waist under a loose *écharpe* of white wool and blue chiffon disposed in parallel stripes, left bare the delicate ankles encircled with silver *m'saïs*. The *r'lila*, a sort of caftan made of green brocade, as tight-fitting as a Spanish bolero, brought into relief the lines of a bust nested in the folds of soft fabrics. A scarf of white pongee, called *hazam*, was wound several times around the neck. Under a silver *hantouz*, the nut-brown hair had been twisted in a torsade. This *hantouz* gave the finishing-touch to the suggestive attire and recalled the conical hennin imported into Europe by the wives of returning crusaders.

After an undecided movement, the young man raised himself and went to the door. Still the houri did not move. A book hung from her fingers. When he took hold of it, she turned her head with a smile.

"I thought I had read to the last word?" she said.

"Precisely," he replied, a touch of earnestness apparent under the unconcern of his answer. "That is why I claim the keepsake. I wonder in what mood you and I will again open "*Azyadeh*"? Or perhaps, back in New York, I shall reopen it alone?"

"Very likely."

He came forward and took her hand.

"Gisèle," he said, "you will compel me to believe that you are something of a tempter."

"Why not say flirt?" she protested, vainly attempting to free herself. "I am a tempter because, yielding to your entreaties, I consented to dress in the native garb and be the heroine of Loti for a time. Such is the reward of all great sacrifices, I suppose? Remembering that you came to Morocco after local color, I undertook to create for you a bit of atmosphere. But it was not agreed between us that you would attempt to kiss me at the first opportunity. No doubt I am a tempter because I did not show you the door with a tragical gesture. But, nevertheless, you must bear in mind that even in Morocco big girls of eighteen may not be kissed, no matter how kissable. The thing is of a nature to depreciate their value on the matrimonial market. Is this clear?"

"Pellucid."

"Very well. It is six o'clock, and there will be music on the Place d'Armes. A good dog follows his mistress. I am going up-stairs to exchange this costume for something more conventional, and then we shall turn like caged bears around the band-stand. I shall be down in five minutes."

It took her half an hour. She came down by way of the garden, carrying an armful of roses. She stood near the door a moment, buttoning her long gloves, bathed in the flood of powdered gold which fell on the edge of the Persian rug, as delicately pink and pearly as a sea-shell fresh from the surf. A look of wonder and uncertainty came in the painter's eyes. It was a new Gisèle who met his glance; a Gisèle in a tight-fitting tailor-made, becoming, no doubt, but whose formal stiffness gave the lie to something seen in the costume she had just discarded. In some unaccountable way, he felt that she chose to be, at this particu-

lar moment, an altogether different girl; and he felt a shade discontented that she should thus be able to step so easily into another self.

She brought him his hat and cane, introduced the stem of a rose in his button-hole, and motioned him to follow. They crossed the garden and opened the gate.

Soft music and a gentle breeze added to the charm of that hour, *l'heure verte, l'heure de l'absinthe*, which marks in subtropical climes the resumption of social intercourse. The band of the Fourth Zouaves was playing some selections from "Fervaal"; and there was, among the palms, a *va-et-vient* of women, many of whom were pretty, principally the Spaniards.

Men were not numerous in this gathering. The greater part of Marakesh's male population was, at this hour, busy around the tables of the numerous cafés on the Place d'Armes. A few very young civilians and subalterns, the latter in full uniform, were, however, pacing the piazza to and fro. Although most of them were, as a rule, notably quiet, decent young fellows used to reddening to the hair roots when talking to a woman, they were now loud, boisterous and seemingly fond of big cigars, greeting with bursts of exaggerated hilarity sallies merely mild or even absurd. As a matter of fact, they were wholly bent upon attracting the attention of some particular girl; and under penalty of being left in the background, they had to adjust their manners to the demeanor of the most forward. Leyton caught sight of a second lieutenant who was quietly blowing on the stray locks of a young girl in front of him.

"Talk of flirting," he laughed, turning to his companion

who vainly attempted to repress a smile. "If anything was ever dependent upon climate, it is that. Why, it's outrageous! There's a young fellow, over there, who dared blow on the neck of an English girl; and the lass gives him her rose. Give them a chance, I say, and girls will turn to flirting as naturally as ducks to water. Of course, it's no use when you leave them the freedom they enjoy at home. But provide the large empty house with latticed *mucharabiehs*, the idle hours and the chaperon. In a week they will all turn Spaniards."

"They won't flirt so gracefully, though," said the young woman with just a shade of hostility in her tone.

"I will grant that. But perhaps only because they would lack experience. Look at that Cadiz girl, there, with the pomegranate blossom. What a science in her walking! She balances herself so as to give full value to every curve, to every line. Mere marble or bronze are not consistent with so much warmth, energy and fire. No wonder old Muley-Hassan does not want any but Spaniards among his dancing girls!"

The muffled detonation of a gun interrupted him. The band was now silent. From the neighboring minaret the cry of the muezzin went up:

Allah Akbar!

It was sunset. The liturgical moment, when according to the Koran, it becomes impossible to decide whether a thread is white or black, had arrived. Under the splendid sky of old-rose color, whose softened tones reached the zenith, Marakesh was slowly sinking in the blue shadow of its gardens. The limewash of the nearest houses had assumed the frigid tones white walls take after a rain;

but the blue gray, softened by distance, became cobalt and lavender in the succeeding planes, so that the houses leaning against the ramparts in the background were scarcely less pink than the sky. The gardens of the huerta, now very dark, were in striking contrast with the clear tonality of the buildings. Behind, their contours now scarcely distinguishable in the surging tide of darkness, vales and barren hills vanished towards the highlands of the Atlas. Sheltered in the midst of its hundred thousand palms, Marakesh was an island, a spot of light in the chiaroscuro of desert surroundings. The Tensift River mirrored the sky's soft tones; and far, far away to the south, the sapphire circle of the mountain range, still in the light, sparkled with the thousand gleams of snow-clad summits sufficiently high to watch, in the neighboring ocean, the agony of the sun.

With a singing and monotonous voice, the crowd of the Faithful assembled on the housetops repeated in chorus the sacramental sentence, credo of a fatalistic congregation which seems to awake only to exalt the omnipotence of the God of Ishmaël.

"Allah Akbar! Ya illah il Allah!"

The hour of Islam! The wind carried the soul of one of the great religions of the world. This call to the *fatha* had begun at the confines of Thibet seven hours before, and had come across India, Afghanistan, Persia, Turkey in Asia and Egypt, awaking as it went the echoes of an unforgotten past. It would die here in Moghrib, checked in its march by the ocean which had opposed to Sidi-Okba's victorious hordes the barrier of green waves pregnant with sharks and sudden storms. Allah Akbar!

On all the housetops, men were at this minute looking towards the Holy Places, while women, crowding themselves at the foot of each staircase, awaited impatiently the muezzin's departure to take possession of the *azoteas* for the rest of the evening.

The band struck the tune of the "Paloma." A strange fragrance, *odor di femina*, eucalyptus and pepper-trees, grew more pungent as darkness increased. The sensuality of subtropical climes was already abroad, apparent in the louder-voiced comments of the men, their bolder stares and the insidious provocation in women's attitudes. A hush had fallen. The southern game is cautious and dangerously silent. Who wins, wins on his nerve. Where rivalry is so keen and jealousy so prevalent, Don Juan must, of necessity, take a chance. The Spaniards in the audience despised fisticuffs as fit only for clowns, and half their sweethearts had knives hidden in their stockings.

The feeling of languor was eminently contagious. Leyton, sinking under the hypnotic spell, stole swift glances at his companion. Gisèle appeared listless, frigid and a prey to the melancholy of "Crépuscule Triste," the symphony the band was now playing. The young man, feeling that the hunger his eye had discovered in the searching looks of others loaded the atmosphere as electricity loads a Leyden-jar, wondered at her absent-mindedness. A strikingly handsome Spanish girl, who had been coming towards them and whose longing, insistent glance passed between his companion and himself, turned abruptly with a flap of her velvet skirts.

A low chuckle behind made him turn his head. He caught a lieutenant of spahis in the act of picking up a

silken handkerchief fallen from the belt of the Spaniard. His companion, a young captain of the Foreign Legion, attracted and retained the painter's attention. Such firmness of determination blazed in the calm glance, the leonine forehead was so resplendent with intellect, that the American stared at the unknown almost with rudeness. The lieutenant of spahis had unfolded a note found in the handkerchief.

He rapidly perused it. "This is meant for you, I think," he said, tendering the paper to his friend with an equivocal smile.

The captain took the message, crumpled it and tossed it away, unread.

"Let us take the side alley," he replied. "We shall be quieter."

Then Leyton noticed that at the sound of his voice Gisèle turned around with a start. Both officers saluted rigidly.

When they had passed, the painter inquired, without indicating which of the officers he meant.

"Who is he?"

Gisèle's answer was almost disdainful.

"Captain d'Ornano," she said. "A Corsican, a great man and a woman-hater. He is papa's *officier d'ordonnance*. The other man is Lieutenant de Vaudreuil, who waltzes to perfection and wears the civilian garb remarkably well, as you can see. Just now you saw them in characteristic rôles."

"How is that?"

"Can't you guess? It's really very simple. Convinced that warfare and love-making are inconsistent, Captain

d'Ornano shows the disdain of a conquering pasha for mere women; while de Vaudreuil, the Hæphestion of this Alexander, is always ready to patch up and repair for his own use the crushed feminine admirations strewing the road behind the triumphal cart of his friend. You have witnessed the incident of the handkerchief? Vaudreuil knows well that at d'Ornano's side he shines with the reflected light of a satellite. The other is far too intelligent not to see through this game; but his Corsican self-worship is lonely and requires a high priest. Nothing extraordinary in this, mind you! Achilles had Patroclus, Orestes Pylades and Hercules Philoctetes.

"Strange girl!" thought Leyton. How painstakingly artificial of expression and French of thought, in spite of the temperament inherited from an American mother! Level-headed, no doubt, but how acrobatic in her balance! Her opinions reflected the literary fashions; her attitudes and costumes borrowed their stiff charm and subdued splendor from Byzantine mosaics. Her feelings . . . He realized that, as yet, he was remotely located from her confidence, and that since her childhood she had been taught to conceal her real self. All he was allowed to glance upon were the exquisitely artful movements of the puppet. Perhaps, after all, the real Gisèle was little more than a compound of theories and learned phrases. He inquired absent-mindedly:

"You did not tell me what made Captain d'Ornano such a great man? He has a remarkable face, a Cæsarian face, I am tempted to say, and it did not escape my notice that he wore the cross of the Legion of Honor. I am aware that every Frenchman gets that in time, but when

he earns it before he is thirty, he must, necessarily, have done things. Where did he get that scar on the forehead?"

"Oh, somewhere, between the Tchad and Tripoli," she replied with affected carelessness. "He was with Monnier, you know. It was he who led the command back to the coast after Commandant Monnier and Captain Trafèli were murdered by the Tuaregg. They started two hundred and five, and he managed to bring one hundred and ninety-eight of them back to the coast after having covered four hundred leagues and fought the Tuaregg back eighteen times. This in itself is remarkable, but the most extraordinary part of the performance is that Captain d'Ornano succeeded in mapping the country despite the opposition of the nomads and was able to prove to the War Department that in every action he managed to fight on ground of his own choosing. What time is it, by the way? We must be home for supper."

It was seven o'clock. The band had departed and the Place d'Armes was now deserted. The moon was somewhere, invisible yet. There were no stars. Leyton, who had been absently poking a palm-tree with his cane, wheeled around as he saw his companion retrace her steps. Two officers in uniform had been approaching behind them. The older man was General Barge de Diolie, Gisèle's father. The younger was the captain of the Legion who had made so deep an impression upon the painter.

"Here is your man, George," said the General by way of presentation. "What Captain d'Ornano doesn't know about Morocco, nobody knows. He will answer your questions, and will, I trust, hammer some common sense

into your head. Shake hands with my nephew, d'Ornano. This is the specimen who intends to go and paint the palm gardens of the Draa River."

After four years in London, in the studio of Latimer Morpès, of the Royal Academy, George Leyton had landed in Morocco by accident, chiefly because Tangier is so near Gibraltar. His goal had been Benarés. When the P. & O. liner left Gibraltar without him at the time he was busy buying trinkets in Tangier, he happened to remember that he possessed in Marakesh an uncle and a cousin.

This was not his first meeting with Gisèle. Two years previously, when Mme. de Diolie was still living, he had renounced his project of a holiday in the Norwegian fjords, to answer the summons of his mother who called him home for the summer. On Long Island he had met his aunt and his cousin, a girl of sixteen. Gisèle was then blossoming into girlhood, and the twenty-two-year-old youngster had easily persuaded himself that his duty was to fall in love with her. This he did conscientiously. Gisèle, just out of the convent, evinced an eager disposition to make the most of the freedom she was allowed on American soil, and took advantage of the opportunity to engage in an innocent flirtation with her cousin. During the six months following her return home, letters had travelled between London and North Africa regularly. Then an abrupt silence had come. It was not of the girl's seeking. Her admirer had developed an interest in a girl student with ambitions and high-flown theories who married a year later and forgot all about painting.

In the meantime, Mme. de Diolie had died, the French had invaded Morocco, and General de Diolie had received the command of the troops stationed in Marakesh. The day Leyton found himself watching the *Empress of India* as she furrowed her way seaward in a cloud of black smoke, he reflected that after all he was not so much going to India as leaving England, where painting by gaslight had become distasteful. But a real sun shone over Morocco. Determined to try the experiment, the would-be Orientalist boarded an English boat for Mogador and, a week later, made an unexpected appearance in Marakesh.

This was two weeks since. He had begun preparations for future work. His plans included an expedition across the Adrar with the object of painting the fabulous gardens of the Draa River. This project, it is true, was still in the embryonic state. General de Diolie intended that it should remain so for a time. Hence the request he had made of Captain d'Ornano to acquaint Leyton fully with the dangers of such an expedition, and furnish him all the information necessary to carry it to a successful end, if he should decide to undertake it.

CHAPTER II

A BERBER OF THE ATLAS

Since Marakesh, after the foolish expenditures of Muley-Hassan, who had squandered five millions sterling in the building of mosques, giant caravanseries and palaces, had become the jewel of Islam, it had taken the place of Cairo as a winter resort. From September to May, the foreign colony, wholly bent on pleasure, was numerous. The climate at least equalled that of Egypt, and the unsurpassed beauty of the surrounding foot-hills was an inducement altogether lacking in the valley of the Nile. The rapid growth of the city had, moreover, advertised it as a paradise for speculators. Marakesh had boomed as never city boomed before. Not because oil or rich ore had been discovered, but because an exceedingly fanciful Sultan had undertaken to transplant bodily the population of one of his capitals to the other. Fez, ever threatened by the rebellious Riata and Zimour, who did not scruple to appear in force within sight of the ramparts and boldly kidnap women, had been left an almost deserted town, while Marakesh had swollen in fifteen months from one hundred and twenty thousand to three hundred thousand inhabitants. It was indeed wonderful that a monarch, who seemed shorn of every vestige of power, could successfully carry through such a scheme. But the underlying force

which had made the move possible was so smooth in its workings as not to attract the attention. The Sultan got all the credit where none whatever belonged to him. The Jews, who had suggested and financed the undertaking, feared and loathed the prophets of the north, who talked of bleeding the children of Jacob for funds to undertake a holy war against the French. They had, as a consequence, made a last effort to save the Sultan who represented the lesser evil.

However, the expensive whims of the spendthrift had soon thrown them into convulsions, and they had had recourse to another scheme. As a preliminary move, they had closed their purses to Muley-Hassan; they had paid countless provocation agents and had relied on their Algerine brethren to raise the howl of murder. Cosmopolitan Israel was soon dictating to the French government the course it ought to follow; no less prompt to urge it forward in the name of humanity than to point out the fact that Germany might see her chance to jump into the troubled waters. When it was talked in Paris of extending to the Moorish Jews the citizenship already enjoyed by their Algerine brethren, pandemonium was let loose in Morocco. It was then that the French, bound to restore order, had put their African army on the move. They became masters of Fez in a fortnight and of Marakesh in a month.

But if the overthrow of the Arab power in the plains of western Morocco proved an easy task to the French arms, it went quite otherwise with the independent tribes of the mountainous Bled-es-Sibla. The Berber strongholds of the Atlas were the hornet's nest French policy had perma-

nently decided to avoid. Attempts at raiding the more peaceful populations of the valleys had brought stern repression on their originators; but the Berbers remained masters of their mountain passes. As a result of this policy of economy, the ferment of insurrection was left to work freely in the anarchical highlands, where secret societies and religious brotherhoods kept up the agitation.

The basis of Moslem society being religious obedience, it was natural that all the brotherhoods established in the mountains should draw their inspiration from the national junta. The Senussiya had so far outgrown all the other sects, that they had become a sort of carbonari society whose influence was truly national. In Morocco, the Sultan's authority had never been based altogether on brute force. It was a mitigated despotism less temporal than religious. Theoretically, the Sultan, a reputed descendant of the prophet, reigned because he was the holiest of holy men. But if anything in his conduct gave rise to the suspicion that he did not follow to the letter the Koran's minutest precept, the religious body organized the opposition, and disaffection, followed by open revolt, marked the rise of a new pretender. The coming of the French had not altered this state of affairs. The most turbulent part of the population: ulemas, imans, muezzins, marabouts, professors and students in theology, had, it is true, learned caution. But they all belonged to the order of the Senussiya; and the Kutubia mosque was still the birthplace of conspiracies which had lost nothing of their efficiency for being directed against Muley-Hassan, a usurper whom the poisoning of his cousin had placed on the throne, and the foreign foe that upheld him.

As it was pointed out to the painter in the conversation which took place at table, crossing the Atlas range in times of agitation was fraught with dangers it would be foolhardy to face. It was true that to reach the Draa it was not at all necessary to speak the Berber dialects—they were so numerous and differed so widely that members of adjoining tribes often failed to understand each other—but an extensive knowledge of Arabic was required. He would have to conceal his faith, and even if he succeeded in passing himself off as a Moslem, he would be unable to paint, since the Koran forbids the reproduction of living things.

As he listened to d'Ornano's explanations, Leyton wondered at Gisèle's behavior. Throughout the meal she seemed intent on laughing at d'Ornano's expense. She affected to believe that the Corsican painted the situation blacker than it really was, because, having himself succeeded in crossing the range, he wanted to impress upon his public the difficulty of the feat. By his silence, d'Ornano plainly intimated that he held the opinions of the young woman to be wholly negligible. Then, as the conversation took a new turn, he found himself in disagreement with the General himself.

He had just expressed the view that the untrammelled freedom the French government allowed the mountain tribes was a political as well as a military mistake. The General turned to Leyton.

"D'Ornano is so anxious to add a fourth *galon* to the three he already possesses that he dreams only of involving his country in bloody war," he vouchsafed by way of explanation. "For my part, I am absolutely convinced that the Berbers can never be more than an annoyance.

Able men, like the Abd-el-Khader of seventy years ago, could not to-day lead them to victory. And where is the military genius who could drill their lawless *harkas* and *mahallas* into regular armies? A German instructor of Turkish troops could not hope to command their confidence. What they need is a Von Moltke who would at the same time be a national chief."

"Granted," interrupted d'Ornano. "But a man such as you describe is living."

"If he is, I don't know him."

"Precisely. But what if I gave you the proof that the Jugurtha to whom I refer is only awaiting, before beginning operations, the word of his Senussi friends."

"I await your proofs," said the General incredulously.

D'Ornano reddened. He turned to the native servant.

"Ali," he ordered, "run to the caravansery of Yacoob, in old Marakesh. Ask for Sidi-Malik, son of Hachem; and tell him to come here *fissa bezef*."

The *chaouch* left the room. Gisèle chuckled.

"This is pure melodrama, Monsieur d'Ornano," she exclaimed. "Had I known you possessed such a keen understanding of the principles of the *mise en scène*, I should have written your name below that of your friend de Vaudreuil, on my list of eligibles for amateur theatricals. Who is Sidi-Malik?"

"An ex-caravan master," replied the Corsican, turning to Leyton with an obvious determination to ignore the taunt. "Before we seized Morocco and put a stop to slavery, he made some money, I believe. But you know the usual failing of the camel-driver? A woman, or maybe two, spent his money faster than he made it. Monnier

found him on a street corner of Tlemcen, famished and so destitute that he possessed only one burnous—mostly holes and vermin at that. He gave him a job. Sidi-Malik is as full of vices as he is riddled with small-pox; but he has a magnificent nerve, and he is a true elephant-hunter. I saw him time and again jump from his horse in full career and attack the elephant on foot, alone and with nothing but a short sword. After a while we became good friends. I brought him back with the others, after the massacre of Monnier and Trafèli, and as a scout he did wonders. As he seemed very much attached to me, I felt something like a shock when I learned that he had left us without a word the morning after we reached El-Golea. I found him here two months ago. He found me, rather. What do you think he was doing?"

"You can make such wild guesses in this country and still remain within the range of things which are considered tame, that we had better give it up," answered the General. "You seem to have something enormous in mind."

"I am afraid I have. Where is Khadour?"

He referred to the second servant. It was Gisèle who replied.

"He went to the kitchen, I believe. Why do you ask?"

"I wanted to make sure that he was not within hearing, that's all. I will trust Ali, who is an old soldier, but not Khadour. The Senussiya have excellent spies, and I do not want Sidi-Malik to find a cobra in his bed or a strangler behind his door. It's all he deserves, and, ultimately, he will have to face that sort of thing; but, if I can help it, it will not be before he has given me enough information to hang a few dozens of these rascals. When I met him,

a month ago, he was blackmailing the Sultan. In some unaccountable way he had become possessed of the knowledge that Muley-Hassan had succeeded—I hate to think of the cost of the experience, by the way!—in leading away from her duties the wife of a foreign consul. He took the trouble to collect proofs, made sure that one government was disposed to pay dear for the discreditable information, and went straight to the grand eunuch with talk of international scandal. Old Muley-Hassan is no longer what he used to be; but he still has enough power left to send people, minus a head, to rot in the tall reeds growing on the banks of the irrigating canals. Sidi-Malik is so wide awake and knows so well how to make it known that he actually scared the old man. He got two hundred douros a month and the virtual assurance that he would be left unmolested if he attempted blackmail on the rich men of the town. This was a bait, you understand. But Sidi-Malik deceived all expectations by refraining from availing himself of the privilege. No virtue here, of course. A proverb says that fear is the beginning of wisdom; and Sidi-Malik has a tremendous amount of respect for the Resident General.”

“He had better,” grumbled General de Diolie between two bites.

“Yes, he had better. But if you believe that even fear is going to stop him you are sadly in the wrong. He completed a new scheme, and this is how we fell together.”

“Allow me to extend my congratulations,” exploded the irrepressible Gisèle. “Anything as big as the blackmail plan?”

This time d'Ornano consented to smile. The sarcasm had failed to penetrate.

"Far bigger, as you will see. Sidi-Malik is a kind of Asmodeus endowed with the universal knowledge of other people's most secret thoughts. He has—Heaven knows by what devious channels!—reached the conviction that Muley-Hassan's life is none too secure; and, of course, he is aware that his pension stops the day the Sultan dies. This is point number one. In point number two, he figured that if he could make a friend of the Resident General, he not only would keep his pension, but that no power in Moghrib would be able to stop him. He came to ask me to fill the gap between the two propositions."

"What did he want exactly?" interrupted General de Diolie.

"Nothing more nor less than a promise to take him to the Resident General. I told him I could not do that."

"What happened then?"

"He told me a few things that fairly made me gasp. I promised him I would speak to you. . . ."

A scream of terror from Gisèle made everybody turn. The girl was now laughing hysterically, amused almost to tears by the extraordinary appearance of the trio framed in the open door. Ali came first, his well-trained servant gravity enhancing the preposterousness of the couple he was about to usher in. These two personages still stood in the half gloom of the veranda, against a background of frantic cypresses of absolute blackness under a full moon and a turquoise sky. One was a giant negro in white *gandourah* and red fez, a prodigious smile frozen on the ivory gleaming between his thick lips. In his knotty fist

he grabbed a *matrack*, the formidable bludgeon in use among Berbers. His companion was Sidi-Malik himself. The camel-driver had, for the time being, assumed the personage of an old negress, and his make-up, remarkable from a realistic standpoint, reached the limits of the comical. He had piled on top of each other the pieces of a monkey's outfit, crazy garments of an irritating color whose patchings were as indescribable as they were picturesque. He seemed rather short; but the breadth of his body at the shoulders made up for his lack of stature. Altogether he was of powerful, compact build, bow-legged, like a thorough horseman, and bearing a strong likeness to a Tartar.

"Where art thou coming from, thus garbed as the black daughter of a black devil?" asked the Captain as soon as the hilarity of all began to subside. "In the first place, where didst thou ever get such a dress?"

At this Sidi-Malik looked the part of the actor who meets with eggs of mature age where he had expected applause. Then he examined his raiment critically.

"*Inshallah!*" he answered at last. "I brought it back with me all the way from Sokoto. Dost thou remember the old woman we found sitting near a little child, in a deserted court-yard of the village of Kong-Koro, the evening of the day we fought with the slave-traders of Tipoo-Salam?"

"Well?"

"I gave her figs to eat. She sold me these and also charms against the evil eye. She said they had once been worn by the Sultana. It was two years ago, Sidi, and two years is time enough for garments to lose their color and look *meskeen*."

"Yes, they look *meskeen*, to be sure," d'Ornano resumed with a gravity which caused everybody to roar. "But it must have been a good bargain at the time. Thou didst not steal the garments, by any chance? No? All right. Answer my question."

"What question, Sidi?"

"Where didst thou go this evening?"

"Oh! I went to the Hamam."

D'Ornano looked at General de Diolie with widening eyes.

"Why!" he said. "This is Wednesday, isn't it?"

"Yes, Wednesday."

"By Jove! And this fellow tells us he is coming back from the Public Baths. This is women's day."

The thing was so enormous that even Gisèle forgot to smile. She looked with increasing wonder at the phenomenon who not only had dared undertake what not one man in twenty thousand would attempt, but who readily acknowledged the fact.

"Allah *kerim!*" ejaculated d'Ornano. "To the Hamam! But why? Surely thou didst not run such a risk for a pastime? How didst thou get out? They must have compelled thee to undress before entering the *beïtoural*."

Sidi-Malik shook his head in denegation.

"No, Sidi. I learned what I wanted without having to go so far."

Gisèle had risen. They all left the table and passed into the adjoining room. Ali brought the coffee. He was then ordered to lead the negro to the kitchen and give him food. Sidi-Malik, nothing daunted, sat himself cross-legged in the middle of the rug. D'Ornano pushed towards him

Si-Hamza turned sharply in the saddle. She waved the paper, waved it a second, drew it again at the events, ready to swallow the message and to sanity should her exclamation, instead of the desired result, cause her to be annoyed by the some by-standers. Si-Hamza entered the enclosure no sign that he had understood. She bit her lip that she had failed. One behind the other, and in the Sultan's retinue passed the gate. She decided to go, when a horseman came out around in perplexity. There were several who and he was at a loss to know to which of the referred. But Djeilma made two steps towards pelling his uncertainty.

"Didst thou call Si-Hamza?" he asked Mokrani. Is there a message from the French?

"From whom among the French should I expect a message?" she inquired guardedly.

Mokrani answered question for question.

"Is there no dog barking in the Wad-el-"

"Then there is a message, Inshallah!"

"If Mustapha has not been set free, it is wounded in the leg. Tell Si-Hamza that I am in danger. I am sent to discuss with him how to free him."

Mokrani reëntered the enclosure. He was minutes later.

"Si-Hamza bids thee go to his camp," he said near his tent. He will join thee in an hour."

Left alone, the Circassian wondered what

he saddle. She pressed it again and the message and to simulate instead of bringing annoyed by the question entered the enclosure. She bit her lips, kissed the other, all the while the gate. She had seen came out and here several women among which of them Si-Hamza steps towards him.

"?" he asked. "In the French?" "Which should Si-Hamza guardedly.

question. "Wad-el-Haluf?" "Hallah!" she cried. "Free, it is because Si-Hamza that Sidi Lema with him the best of e. He reappeared.

camp," he said. "He in a quarter of

dered whether she

anything to gain by taking French leave of Anoun-Dialo. In the fast falling darkness, this was by no means impossible feat. But she reflected that the negro would now be well content to remain in the background, especially as the negotiations about to begin did not concern him. Moreover, with a companion of his size, the risk she ran in crossing the Moslem lines after nightfall was considerably lessened. If he asked for his paper, she could tell him that Si-Hamza had already received it. She went back to the negro and gave him a brief account of the results she had already obtained. Convinced now that she was working for the best of their common interests, Anoun-Dialo made no difficulty about following her.

They waited five minutes outside Si-Hamza's tent. Djeïlma kept silent. She was rehearsing her rôle and marshalling arguments for the coming encounter. At last the chieftain made his appearance.

Dismounting, he made a sign to the visitors to follow him. Djeïlma stopped Anoun-Dialo on the threshold. The negro was surprised at hearing himself sentenced to remain outside, but he did not demur. As Si-Hamza sat himself cross-legged on a rug, Djeïlma tendered him d'Ornano's note at the end of her finger tips, the gesture affording her an opportunity to display her bracelets and heavy rings. Then she closed her veil tight on her mouth and remained standing, an enigma in linen.

Si-Hamza read, pondered over the contents of the message and raised his glance. Djeïlma made not a move. He asked, already puzzled by her strange quiet:

"Did Sidi d'Ornano send thee here?"

"No," she said. "I stole the paper."

This was the first blow. It drew blood. It had been so decided and so aggressive that Si-Hamza considered her with amazement. She added unconcern:

"What cannot be gotten by fair means has otherwise. The negro I left outside is a fool. He took the karta from him."

"Who art thou?"

The Circassian let her veil fall at her feet and slid down, sitting in full light.

"I am what thou seest," she replied. "Nothing."

Of all feminine gestures, that which uplifts the head towards the neck and raises the hair is perhaps the most graceful. Djeilma shook her curls. When Si-Hamza, a prey to a feeling in which bewilderment was uppermost, was silent, her smile began to show. If her aim had been to surprise and disappoint, she had succeeded beyond her expectations. By her unbidden, she had almost scandalized. He had appeared as he was for a demonstration of the part of a casual visitor, Si-Hamza was not a fanatic to remind the young woman that she was the presence of a descendant of Muhamed. The branch to which he belonged had long ago become a thing of rigorists. The drunkenness of old Si-Hamza had been the standing joke of government circles. It was rumored that the old man never failed to put his finger in his champagne and to shake out the cork declaring with all gravity that "as the first is accursed" the rest could be drunk with

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 She added with a

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breach of the precepts set forth by his ancestor. Young
 Si-Hamza dispensed even with this formality.

"Now that thou hast seen the means," the Circassian
 went on, "shall I tell thee what ends beauty can serve
 When I belonged to Muley-Hassan's harem, I thwarted
 three times Abd-er-Rhaman's purpose by upsetting the
 cup of the poison-bearer. The negro I left outside will
 tell thee that I had grand eunuch Mustapha robbed of all
 his belongings and kicked as bare as a worm into the street.
 When Sidi-Malik beat me and Sidi Leïtoun declined to do
 my pleasure, I had both of them taken prisoners. It
 depends now on thee that Sidi Leïtoun is released before
 Sheikh Muhamed learns of Mustapha's wound. Thou
 art a witness that I can serve or cross many purposes.
 I came to learn what price thou art willing to pay for the
 life of Sidi Leïtoun?"

When it dawned upon Si-Hamza that this extraordinary
 preamble carried a carefully veiled threat, and served
 most to cover an offer to barter Leyton's life and freedom
 against some palpable advantage, his amusement knew no
 limits. It was certainly the first time that a piece of impu-
 dence of this size was served him in such a cup. He got
 up laughing.

"Am I to infer that, if I am unwilling to pay thy price
 Sidi Leïtoun is as good as dead?" he said at last. "We
 worded for a blackmailer, woman-child. By what name
 am I to call thee?"

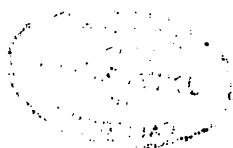
"Djeïlma."

"Well, then, Djeïlma, how old art thou?"

"Sixteen, ya Sidi."

"I see; too young not to make mistakes. . . . Is

**IN THE WAKE OF THE
GREEN BANNER**







They sat down in the shade of a tamarisk

IN THE WAKE OF THE GREEN BANNER

BY
EUGENE PAUL METOUR

ILLUSTRATED BY E. M. ASHE



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1909

GENERAL

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i

To My Father

In memory of the Ouaransenis and of those happy years in the Beni-Chougran mountains; to remind him of my first impression of color: the purple mass of the Djebel Antar, yet in the light, while the redoubt at its feet had already sunk in the blue shade, and the oval, vesper sun, behind the tamarisks, gleaming scarlet through the rose-colored dust.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. THE HOUR OF ISLAM	1
II. A BERBER OF THE ATLAS	14
III. "THE HORSE THAT GOES TOWARDS SUNSET" .	28
IV. RUNNING THE GAUNTLET OF SENUSSIYA . .	40
V. IN THE IMPERIAL GARDENS	56
VI. GAZI	65
VII. IN THE WILDS OF THE ADRAR	89
VIII. THE LIONS OF TILIMSA	107
IX. THE OASIS	117
X. AT THE FOOT OF THE KASBAH	132
XI. WITH THE CHILDREN OF THE TABLE-LAND .	143
XII. THE GATHERING OF ISLAM	155
XIII. "WHO CAN ACCOUNT FOR A RUMI'S THOUGHTS?" ;	164
XIV. THE PREY THE OASIS SENDS TO THE DESERT .	175
XV. THE VEILED PEOPLE OF THE LANCE . . .	187
XVI. THE FOURTH GALON	204
XVII. DJEÏLMA LETS FALL HER HAÏK	227

CHAPTER	PAGE
XVIII. THE EYE OF THE WAD-EL-HALUF	246
XIX. ABD-ER-RHAMAN-ES-SHERIFF	256
XX. "PARADISE IS UNDER THE SHADOW OF SWORDS"	269
XXI. THE BASTION OF THE WAD-EL-HALUF . . .	289
XXII. THE SORTIE	306
XXIII. HANDS IN THE SALT	316
XXIV. THE HONORS OF WAR	330
XXV. THE ENIGMATICAL CAFARD	347
XXVI. ON THE TAGREMARET ROAD	368
XXVII. THE FARMHOUSE OF AÏN-GUERGOUR . . .	378
XXVIII. THE THOUGHTS OF THE NIGHT-WATCH . .	387
XXIX. A CORSICAN REGULUS	398
XXX. SI-HAMZA REMEMBERS HIS OATH	414
XXXI. "THE PEN THAT WRITES WITHOUT INK" . .	421
XXXII. SIDI-MALIK COMES INTO HIS OWN	436

ILLUSTRATIONS

They sat down in the shade of a tamarisk . . Frontispiece

	FACING PAGE
<i>"Aroua mena! Sidi d'Ornano! Sidi Leïtoun! Akh</i>	
<i>Arbi"</i>	86

Then a sickening weakness stole over him 202

The mad woman, Inshallah! 422



IN THE WAKE OF THE GREEN BANNER

CHAPTER I

THE HOUR OF ISLAM

The room was high and wide. A trefoil-shaped opening faced the door. Through the trefoil the glance swept the European town. A glimpse through the door revealed a Moorish peristyle, a pergola, an Oriental city bathed in the transparencies of late afternoon's atmosphere, and an endless perspective of palm gardens.

There was little light in the solemn apartment. Blue on the limewash of the vaulted ceiling, violet on the pink walls where the arabesques of a whimsical frieze shone with a glitter of molten brass, twilight shadow was the true inmate of the room. A thick Persian rug covered the mosaic. Three onyx steps led to an alcove.

The most conspicuous piece of furniture was a low Moorish bed of red damask and green linen. A large coffer, such as native women use to hoard their jewels and finery, standing close to the wall and covered with a leopard-skin, constituted a very decorative, if not a very comfortable, divan. Upon the rug of old-rose color, near an unlighted *brasero* of mediæval Spanish pattern, a mandolin rested on cushions of brocade and velvet. Near by, a large brass

tray supported an aiguillere. On a small hexagonal stool of ebony, whose mosaic top and shelves shone with inlaid lozenges and arabesques of silver, were tiny coffee-cups. A heavy Moorish lantern of green bronze, carved and chiselled with such skill that it had the effect of lace, hung from the pendentive of the ceiling. The walls were bare. In the corners the shadows were passing through all the changes Arab blues assume in the radiance of dusk.

Lying on the cushions, in the middle of the room, the painter George Leyton remained perfectly still. He almost held his breath, fearful lest a slight noise should dissipate the vapor of his dream. Laden with all the *huerta's* fragrance, a chilly wind entered the apartment. Small tongues of green and blue flames were dancing on top of the charcoal filling the Spanish brasero. At the extremity of its brass chain, its colored prisms of diamond-cut glass throwing at intervals weird flashes on the bare walls and ceiling, the heavy lantern oscillated with the regularity of a pendulum. These lights in movement on the plastering forcibly reminded the painter of an effect of chiaroscuro he had observed, one stormy night, in the hold of a smuggling schooner, and gave him the sensation of being again aboard some vessel. He followed them a moment, dreaming of the old days of Mediterranean pirates, when Ibrahim's swarthy Egyptian sailors, nude to the waist, barefoot, bejewelled and turbaned, cast dice on a caramuzel's deck, losing and winning female slaves kidnapped in Corfu or Patras.

His glance turned to settle again on the gem of which the apartment was the setting. If her race bore some connection to her wearing apparel, she was a Moor. Aureoled

with pale colors, she had, under the green gauze and the frail, transparent silks, the graceful curves, the robust plasticity and small bones of an Ouled-Nail dancing girl. The roses and lilies of her complexion were more puzzling. Her attire was perhaps less Moorish than Algerine; since the Turkish shintiyan of scarlet taffeta, tied at the waist under a loose *écharpe* of white wool and blue chiffon disposed in parallel stripes, left bare the delicate ankles encircled with silver *m'saïs*. The *r'hila*, a sort of caftan made of green brocade, as tight-fitting as a Spanish bolero, brought into relief the lines of a bust nested in the folds of soft fabrics. A scarf of white pongee, called *hazam*, was wound several times around the neck. Under a silver *hantouz*, the nut-brown hair had been twisted in a torsade. This *hantouz* gave the finishing-touch to the suggestive attire and recalled the conical hennin imported into Europe by the wives of returning crusaders.

After an undecided movement, the young man raised himself and went to the door. Still the houri did not move. A book hung from her fingers. When he took hold of it, she turned her head with a smile.

"I thought I had read to the last word?" she said.

"Precisely," he replied, a touch of earnestness apparent under the unconcern of his answer. "That is why I claim the keepsake. I wonder in what mood you and I will again open "Azyadeh"? Or perhaps, back in New York, I shall reopen it alone?"

"Very likely."

He came forward and took her hand.

"Gisèle," he said, "you will compel me to believe that you are something of a tempter."

"Why not say flirt?" she protested, vainly attempting to free herself. "I am a tempter because, yielding to your entreaties, I consented to dress in the native garb and be the heroine of Loti for a time. Such is the reward of all great sacrifices, I suppose? Remembering that you came to Morocco after local color, I undertook to create for you a bit of atmosphere. But it was not agreed between us that you would attempt to kiss me at the first opportunity. No doubt I am a tempter because I did not show you the door with a tragical gesture. But, nevertheless, you must bear in mind that even in Morocco big girls of eighteen may not be kissed, no matter how kissable. The thing is of a nature to depreciate their value on the matrimonial market. Is this clear?"

"Pellucid."

"Very well. It is six o'clock, and there will be music on the Place d'Armes. A good dog follows his mistress. I am going up-stairs to exchange this costume for something more conventional, and then we shall turn like caged bears around the band-stand. I shall be down in five minutes."

It took her half an hour. She came down by way of the garden, carrying an armful of roses. She stood near the door a moment, buttoning her long gloves, bathed in the flood of powdered gold which fell on the edge of the Persian rug, as delicately pink and pearly as a sea-shell fresh from the surf. A look of wonder and uncertainty came in the painter's eyes. It was a new Gisèle who met his glance; a Gisèle in a tight-fitting tailor-made, becoming, no doubt, but whose formal stiffness gave the lie to something seen in the costume she had just discarded. In some unaccountable way, he felt that she chose to be, at this particu-

lar moment, an altogether different girl; and he felt a shade discontented that she should thus be able to step so easily into another self.

She brought him his hat and cane, introduced the stem of a rose in his button-hole, and motioned him to follow. They crossed the garden and opened the gate.

Soft music and a gentle breeze added to the charm of that hour, *l'heure verte*, *l'heure de l'absinthe*, which marks in subtropical climes the resumption of social intercourse. The band of the Fourth Zouaves was playing some selections from "Fervaal"; and there was, among the palms, a *va-et-vient* of women, many of whom were pretty, principally the Spaniards.

Men were not numerous in this gathering. The greater part of Marakesh's male population was, at this hour, busy around the tables of the numerous cafés on the Place d'Armes. A few very young civilians and subalterns, the latter in full uniform, were, however, pacing the piazza to and fro. Although most of them were, as a rule, notably quiet, decent young fellows used to reddening to the hair roots when talking to a woman, they were now loud, boisterous and seemingly fond of big cigars, greeting with bursts of exaggerated hilarity sallies merely mild or even absurd. As a matter of fact, they were wholly bent upon attracting the attention of some particular girl; and under penalty of being left in the background, they had to adjust their manners to the demeanor of the most forward. Leyton caught sight of a second lieutenant who was quietly blowing on the stray locks of a young girl in front of him.

"Talk of flirting," he laughed, turning to his companion

who vainly attempted to repress a smile. "If anything was ever dependent upon climate, it is that. Why, it's outrageous! There's a young fellow, over there, who dared blow on the neck of an English girl; and the lass gives him her rose. Give them a chance, I say, and girls will turn to flirting as naturally as ducks to water. Of course, it's no use when you leave them the freedom they enjoy at home. But provide the large empty house with latticed *mucharabiehs*, the idle hours and the chaperon. In a week they will all turn Spaniards."

"They won't flirt so gracefully, though," said the young woman with just a shade of hostility in her tone.

"I will grant that. But perhaps only because they would lack experience. Look at that Cadiz girl, there, with the pomegranate blossom. What a science in her walking! She balances herself so as to give full value to every curve, to every line. Mere marble or bronze are not consistent with so much warmth, energy and fire. No wonder old Muley-Hassan does not want any but Spaniards among his dancing girls!"

The muffled detonation of a gun interrupted him. The band was now silent. From the neighboring minaret the cry of the *muezzin* went up:

Allah, Akbar!

It was sunset. The liturgical moment, when according to the Koran, it becomes impossible to decide whether a thread is white or black, had arrived. Under the splendid sky of old-rose color, whose softened tones reached the zenith, Marakesh was slowly sinking in the blue shadow of its gardens. The limewash of the nearest houses had assumed the frigid tones white walls take after a rain;

but the blue gray, softened by distance, became cobalt and lavender in the succeeding planes, so that the houses leaning against the ramparts in the background were scarcely less pink than the sky. The gardens of the huerta, now very dark, were in striking contrast with the clear tonality of the buildings. Behind, their contours now scarcely distinguishable in the surging tide of darkness, vales and barren hills vanished towards the highlands of the Atlas. Sheltered in the midst of its hundred thousand palms, Marakesh was an island, a spot of light in the chiaroscuro of desert surroundings. The Tensift River mirrored the sky's soft tones; and far, far away to the south, the sapphire circle of the mountain range, still in the light, sparkled with the thousand gleams of snow-clad summits sufficiently high to watch, in the neighboring ocean, the agony of the sun.

With a singing and monotonous voice, the crowd of the Faithful assembled on the housetops repeated in chorus the sacramental sentence, credo of a fatalistic congregation which seems to awake only to exalt the omnipotence of the God of Ishmaël.

"Allah Akbar! Ya illah il Allah!"

The hour of Islam! The wind carried the soul of one of the great religions of the world. This call to the *fatha* had begun at the confines of Thibet seven hours before, and had come across India, Afghanistan, Persia, Turkey in Asia and Egypt, awaking as it went the echoes of an unforgotten past. It would die here in Moghrib, checked in its march by the ocean which had opposed to Sidi-Okba's victorious hordes the barrier of green waves pregnant with sharks and sudden storms. Allah Akbar!

On all the housetops, men were at this minute looking towards the Holy Places, while women, crowding themselves at the foot of each staircase, awaited impatiently the muezzin's departure to take possession of the *azoteas* for the rest of the evening.

The band struck the tune of the "Paloma." A strange fragrance, *odor di femina*, eucalyptus and pepper-trees, grew more pungent as darkness increased. The sensuality of subtropical climes was already abroad, apparent in the louder-voiced comments of the men, their bolder stares and the insidious provocation in women's attitudes. A hush had fallen. The southern game is cautious and dangerously silent. Who wins, wins on his nerve. Where rivalry is so keen and jealousy so prevalent, Don Juan must, of necessity, take a chance. The Spaniards in the audience despised fisticuffs as fit only for clowns, and half their sweethearts had knives hidden in their stockings.

The feeling of languor was eminently contagious. Leyton, sinking under the hypnotic spell, stole swift glances at his companion. Gisèle appeared listless, frigid and a prey to the melancholy of "Crépuscule Triste," the symphony the band was now playing. The young man, feeling that the hunger his eye had discovered in the searching looks of others loaded the atmosphere as electricity loads a Leyden-jar, wondered at her absent-mindedness. A strikingly handsome Spanish girl, who had been coming towards them and whose longing, insistent glance passed between his companion and himself, turned abruptly with a flap of her velvet skirts.

A low chuckle behind made him turn his head. He caught a lieutenant of spahis in the act of picking up a

silken handkerchief fallen from the belt of the Spaniard. His companion, a young captain of the Foreign Legion, attracted and retained the painter's attention. Such firmness of determination blazed in the calm glance, the leonine forehead was so resplendent with intellect, that the American stared at the unknown almost with rudeness. The lieutenant of spahis had unfolded a note found in the handkerchief.

He rapidly perused it. "This is meant for you, I think," he said, tendering the paper to his friend with an equivocal smile.

The captain took the message, crumpled it and tossed it away, unread.

"Let us take the side alley," he replied. "We shall be quieter."

Then Leyton noticed that at the sound of his voice Gisèle turned around with a start. Both officers saluted rigidly.

When they had passed, the painter inquired, without indicating which of the officers he meant.

"Who is he?"

Gisèle's answer was almost disdainful.

"Captain d'Ornano," she said. "A Corsican, a great man and a woman-hater. He is papa's *officier d'ordonnance*. The other man is Lieutenant de Vaudreuil, who waltzes to perfection and wears the civilian garb remarkably well, as you can see. Just now you saw them in characteristic rôles."

"How is that?"

"Can't you guess? It's really very simple. Convinced that warfare and love-making are inconsistent, Captain

d'Ornano shows the disdain of a conquering pasha for mere women; while de Vaudreuil, the Hæphestion of this Alexander, is always ready to patch up and repair for his own use the crushed feminine admirations strewing the road behind the triumphal cart of his friend. You have witnessed the incident of the handkerchief? Vaudreuil knows well that at d'Ornano's side he shines with the reflected light of a satellite. The other is far too intelligent not to see through this game; but his Corsican self-worship is lonely and requires a high priest. Nothing extraordinary in this, mind you! Achilles had Patroclus, Orestes Pylades and Hercules Philoctetes.

"Strange girl!" thought Leyton. How painstakingly artificial of expression and French of thought, in spite of the temperament inherited from an American mother! Level-headed, no doubt, but how acrobatic in her balance! Her opinions reflected the literary fashions; her attitudes and costumes borrowed their stiff charm and subdued splendor from Byzantine mosaics. Her feelings . . . He realized that, as yet, he was remotely located from her confidence, and that since her childhood she had been taught to conceal her real self. All he was allowed to glance upon were the exquisitely artful movements of the puppet. Perhaps, after all, the real Gisèle was little more than a compound of theories and learned phrases. He inquired absent-mindedly:

"You did not tell me what made Captain d'Ornano such a great man? He has a remarkable face, a Cæsarian face, I am tempted to say, and it did not escape my notice that he wore the cross of the Legion of Honor. I am aware that every Frenchman gets that in time, but when

he earns it before he is thirty, he must, necessarily, have done things. Where did he get that scar on the forehead?"

"Oh, somewhere, between the Tchad and Tripoli," she replied with affected carelessness. "He was with Monnier, you know. It was he who led the command back to the coast after Commandant Monnier and Captain Trafèli were murdered by the Tuaregg. They started two hundred and five, and he managed to bring one hundred and ninety-eight of them back to the coast after having covered four hundred leagues and fought the Tuaregg back eighteen times. This in itself is remarkable, but the most extraordinary part of the performance is that Captain d'Ornano succeeded in mapping the country despite the opposition of the nomads and was able to prove to the War Department that in every action he managed to fight on ground of his own choosing. What time is it, by the way? We must be home for supper."

It was seven o'clock. The band had departed and the Place d'Armes was now deserted. The moon was somewhere, invisible yet. There were no stars. Leyton, who had been absently poking a palm-tree with his cane, wheeled around as he saw his companion retrace her steps. Two officers in uniform had been approaching behind them. The older man was General Barge de Diolie, Gisèle's father. The younger was the captain of the Legion who had made so deep an impression upon the painter.

"Here is your man, George," said the General by way of presentation. "What Captain d'Ornano doesn't know about Morocco, nobody knows. He will answer your questions, and will, I trust, hammer some common sense

into your head. Shake hands with my nephew, d'Ornano. This is the specimen who intends to go and paint the palm gardens of the Draa River."

After four years in London, in the studio of Latimer Morpès, of the Royal Academy, George Leyton had landed in Morocco by accident, chiefly because Tangier is so near Gibraltar. His goal had been Benarés. When the P. & O. liner left Gibraltar without him at the time he was busy buying trinkets in Tangier, he happened to remember that he possessed in Marakesh an uncle and a cousin.

This was not his first meeting with Gisèle. Two years previously, when Mme. de Diolie was still living, he had renounced his project of a holiday in the Norwegian fjords, to answer the summons of his mother who called him home for the summer. On Long Island he had met his aunt and his cousin, a girl of sixteen. Gisèle was then blossoming into girlhood, and the twenty-two-year-old youngster had easily persuaded himself that his duty was to fall in love with her. This he did conscientiously. Gisèle, just out of the convent, evinced an eager disposition to make the most of the freedom she was allowed on American soil, and took advantage of the opportunity to engage in an innocent flirtation with her cousin. During the six months following her return home, letters had travelled between London and North Africa regularly. Then an abrupt silence had come. It was not of the girl's seeking. Her admirer had developed an interest in a girl student with ambitions and high-flown theories who married a year later and forgot all about painting.

In the meantime, Mme. de Diolie had died, the French had invaded Morocco, and General de Diolie had received the command of the troops stationed in Marakesh. The day Leyton found himself watching the *Empress of India* as she furrowed her way seaward in a cloud of black smoke, he reflected that after all he was not so much going to India as leaving England, where painting by gaslight had become distasteful. But a real sun shone over Morocco. Determined to try the experiment, the would-be Orientalist boarded an English boat for Mogador and, a week later, made an unexpected appearance in Marakesh.

This was two weeks since. He had begun preparations for future work. His plans included an expedition across the Adrar with the object of painting the fabulous gardens of the Draa River. This project, it is true, was still in the embryonic state. General de Diolie intended that it should remain so for a time. Hence the request he had made of Captain d'Ornano to acquaint Leyton fully with the dangers of such an expedition, and furnish him all the information necessary to carry it to a successful end, if he should decide to undertake it.

CHAPTER II

A BERBER OF THE ATLAS

Since Marakesh, after the foolish expenditures of Muley-Hassan, who had squandered five millions sterling in the building of mosques, giant caravanseries and palaces, had become the jewel of Islam, it had taken the place of Cairo as a winter resort. From September to May, the foreign colony, wholly bent on pleasure, was numerous. The climate at least equalled that of Egypt, and the unsurpassed beauty of the surrounding foot-hills was an inducement altogether lacking in the valley of the Nile. The rapid growth of the city had, moreover, advertised it as a paradise for speculators. Marakesh had boomed as never city boomed before. Not because oil or rich ore had been discovered, but because an exceedingly fanciful Sultan had undertaken to transplant bodily the population of one of his capitals to the other. Fez, ever threatened by the rebellious Riata and Zimour, who did not scruple to appear in force within sight of the ramparts and boldly kidnap women, had been left an almost deserted town, while Marakesh had swollen in fifteen months from one hundred and twenty thousand to three hundred thousand inhabitants. It was indeed wonderful that a monarch, who seemed shorn of every vestige of power, could successfully carry through such a scheme. But the underlying force

which had made the move possible was so smooth in its workings as not to attract the attention. The Sultan got all the credit where none whatever belonged to him. The Jews, who had suggested and financed the undertaking, feared and loathed the prophets of the north, who talked of bleeding the children of Jacob for funds to undertake a holy war against the French. They had, as a consequence, made a last effort to save the Sultan who represented the lesser evil.

However, the expensive whims of the spendthrift had soon thrown them into convulsions, and they had had recourse to another scheme. As a preliminary move, they had closed their purses to Muley-Hassan; they had paid countless provocation agents and had relied on their Algerine brethren to raise the howl of murder. Cosmopolitan Israel was soon dictating to the French government the course it ought to follow; no less prompt to urge it forward in the name of humanity than to point out the fact that Germany might see her chance to jump into the troubled waters. When it was talked in Paris of extending to the Moorish Jews the citizenship already enjoyed by their Algerine brethren, pandemonium was let loose in Morocco. It was then that the French, bound to restore order, had put their African army on the move. They became masters of Fez in a fortnight and of Marakesh in a month.

But if the overthrow of the Arab power in the plains of western Morocco proved an easy task to the French arms, it went quite otherwise with the independent tribes of the mountainous Bled-es-Sibla. The Berber strongholds of the Atlas were the hornet's nest French policy had perma-

nently decided to avoid. Attempts at raiding the more peaceful populations of the valleys had brought stern repression on their originators; but the Berbers remained masters of their mountain passes. As a result of this policy of economy, the ferment of insurrection was left to work freely in the anarchical highlands, where secret societies and religious brotherhoods kept up the agitation.

The basis of Moslem society being religious obedience, it was natural that all the brotherhoods established in the mountains should draw their inspiration from the national junta. The Senussiya had so far outgrown all the other sects, that they had become a sort of carbonari society whose influence was truly national. In Morocco, the Sultan's authority had never been based altogether on brute force. It was a mitigated despotism less temporal than religious. Theoretically, the Sultan, a reputed descendant of the prophet, reigned because he was the holiest of holy men. But if anything in his conduct gave rise to the suspicion that he did not follow to the letter the Koran's minutest precept, the religious body organized the opposition, and disaffection, followed by open revolt, marked the rise of a new pretender. The coming of the French had not altered this state of affairs. The most turbulent part of the population: ulemas, imans, muezzins, marabouts, professors and students in theology, had, it is true, learned caution. But they all belonged to the order of the Senussiya; and the Kutubia mosque was still the birthplace of conspiracies which had lost nothing of their efficiency for being directed against Muley-Hassan, a usurper whom the poisoning of his cousin had placed on the throne, and the foreign foe that upheld him.

As it was pointed out to the painter in the conversation which took place at table, crossing the Atlas range in times of agitation was fraught with dangers it would be foolhardy to face. It was true that to reach the Draa it was not at all necessary to speak the Berber dialects—they were so numerous and differed so widely that members of adjoining tribes often failed to understand each other—but an extensive knowledge of Arabic was required. He would have to conceal his faith, and even if he succeeded in passing himself off as a Moslem, he would be unable to paint, since the Koran forbids the reproduction of living things.

As he listened to d'Ornano's explanations, Leyton wondered at Gisèle's behavior. Throughout the meal she seemed intent on laughing at d'Ornano's expense. She affected to believe that the Corsican painted the situation blacker than it really was, because, having himself succeeded in crossing the range, he wanted to impress upon his public the difficulty of the feat. By his silence, d'Ornano plainly intimated that he held the opinions of the young woman to be wholly negligible. Then, as the conversation took a new turn, he found himself in disagreement with the General himself.

He had just expressed the view that the untrammelled freedom the French government allowed the mountain tribes was a political as well as a military mistake. The General turned to Leyton.

"D'Ornano is so anxious to add a fourth *galon* to the three he already possesses that he dreams only of involving his country in bloody war," he vouchsafed by way of explanation. "For my part, I am absolutely convinced that the Berbers can never be more than an annoyance.

Able men, like the Abd-el-Khader of seventy years ago, could not to-day lead them to victory. And where is the military genius who could drill their lawless *harkas* and *mahallas* into regular armies? A German instructor of Turkish troops could not hope to command their confidence. What they need is a Von Moltke who would at the same time be a national chief."

"Granted," interrupted d'Ornano. "But a man such as you describe is living."

"If he is, I don't know him."

"Precisely. But what if I gave you the proof that the Jugurtha to whom I refer is only awaiting, before beginning operations, the word of his Senussi friends."

"I await your proofs," said the General incredulously.

D'Ornano reddened. He turned to the native servant.

"Ali," he ordered, "run to the caravansery of Yacoob, in old Marakesh. Ask for Sidi-Malik, son of Hachem; and tell him to come here *fissa bezef*."

The *chaouch* left the room. Gisèle chuckled.

"This is pure melodrama, Monsieur d'Ornano," she exclaimed. "Had I known you possessed such a keen understanding of the principles of the *mise en scène*, I should have written your name below that of your friend de Vaudreuil, on my list of eligibles for amateur theatricals. Who is Sidi-Malik?"

"An ex-caravan master," replied the Corsican, turning to Leyton with an obvious determination to ignore the taunt. "Before we seized Morocco and put a stop to slavery, he made some money, I believe. But you know the usual failing of the camel-driver? A woman, or maybe two, spent his money faster than he made it. Monnier

found him on a street corner of Tlemcen, famished and so destitute that he possessed only one burnous—mostly holes and vermin at that. He gave him a job. Sidi-Malik is as full of vices as he is riddled with small-pox; but he has a magnificent nerve, and he is a true elephant-hunter. I saw him time and again jump from his horse in full career and attack the elephant on foot, alone and with nothing but a short sword. After a while we became good friends. I brought him back with the others, after the massacre of Monnier and Trafèli, and as a scout he did wonders. As he seemed very much attached to me, I felt something like a shock when I learned that he had left us without a word the morning after we reached El-Golea. I found him here two months ago. He found me, rather. What do you think he was doing?"

"You can make such wild guesses in this country and still remain within the range of things which are considered tame, that we had better give it up," answered the General. "You seem to have something enormous in mind."

"I am afraid I have. Where is Khadour?"

He referred to the second servant. It was Gisèle who replied.

"He went to the kitchen, I believe. Why do you ask?"

"I wanted to make sure that he was not within hearing, that's all. I will trust Ali, who is an old soldier, but not Khadour. The Senussiya have excellent spies, and I do not want Sidi-Malik to find a cobra in his bed or a strangler behind his door. It's all he deserves, and, ultimately, he will have to face that sort of thing; but, if I can help it, it will not be before he has given me enough information to hang a few dozens of these rascals. When I met him,

a month ago, he was blackmailing the Sultan. In some unaccountable way he had become possessed of the knowledge that Muley-Hassan had succeeded—I hate to think of the cost of the experience, by the way!—in leading away from her duties the wife of a foreign consul. He took the trouble to collect proofs, made sure that one government was disposed to pay dear for the discreditable information, and went straight to the grand eunuch with talk of international scandal. Old Muley-Hassan is no longer what he used to be; but he still has enough power left to send people, minus a head, to rot in the tall reeds growing on the banks of the irrigating canals. Sidi-Malik is so wide awake and knows so well how to make it known that he actually scared the old man. He got two hundred douros a month and the virtual assurance that he would be left unmolested if he attempted blackmail on the rich men of the town. This was a bait, you understand. But Sidi-Malik deceived all expectations by refraining from availing himself of the privilege. No virtue here, of course. A proverb says that fear is the beginning of wisdom; and Sidi-Malik has a tremendous amount of respect for the Resident General.”

“He had better,” grumbled General de Diolie between two bites.

“Yes, he had better. But if you believe that even fear is going to stop him you are sadly in the wrong. He completed a new scheme, and this is how we fell together.”

“Allow me to extend my congratulations,” exploded the irrepressible Gisèle. “Anything as big as the blackmail plan?”

This time d'Ornano consented to smile. The sarcasm had failed to penetrate.

"Far bigger, as you will see. Sidi-Malik is a kind of Asmodeus endowed with the universal knowledge of other people's most secret thoughts. He has—Heaven knows by what devious channels!—reached the conviction that Muley-Hassan's life is none too secure; and, of course, he is aware that his pension stops the day the Sultan dies. This is point number one. In point number two, he figured that if he could make a friend of the Resident General, he not only would keep his pension, but that no power in Moghrib would be able to stop him. He came to ask me to fill the gap between the two propositions."

"What did he want exactly?" interrupted General de Diolie.

"Nothing more nor less than a promise to take him to the Resident General. I told him I could not do that."

"What happened then?"

"He told me a few things that fairly made me gasp. I promised him I would speak to you. . . ."

A scream of terror from Gisèle made everybody turn. The girl was now laughing hysterically, amused almost to tears by the extraordinary appearance of the trio framed in the open door. Ali came first, his well-trained servant gravity enhancing the preposterousness of the couple he was about to usher in. These two personages still stood in the half gloom of the veranda, against a background of frantic cypresses of absolute blackness under a full moon and a turquoise sky. One was a giant negro in white *gandourah* and red fez, a prodigious smile frozen on the ivory gleaming between his thick lips. In his knotty fist

he grabbed a *matrack*, the formidable bludgeon in use among Berbers. His companion was Sidi-Malik himself. The camel-driver had, for the time being, assumed the personage of an old negress, and his make-up, remarkable from a realistic standpoint, reached the limits of the comical. He had piled on top of each other the pieces of a monkey's outfit, crazy garments of an irritating color whose patchings were as indescribable as they were picturesque. He seemed rather short; but the breadth of his body at the shoulders made up for his lack of stature. Altogether he was of powerful, compact build, bow-legged, like a thorough horseman, and bearing a strong likeness to a Tartar.

"Where art thou coming from, thus garbed as the black daughter of a black devil?" asked the Captain as soon as the hilarity of all began to subside. "In the first place, where didst thou ever get such a dress?"

At this Sidi-Malik looked the part of the actor who meets with eggs of mature age where he had expected applause. Then he examined his raiment critically.

"*Inshallah!*" he answered at last. "I brought it back with me all the way from Sokoto. Dost thou remember the old woman we found sitting near a little child, in a deserted court-yard of the village of Kong-Koro, the evening of the day we fought with the slave-traders of Tipoo-Salam?"

"Well?"

"I gave her figs to eat. She sold me these and also charms against the evil eye. She said they had once been worn by the Sultana. It was two years ago, Sidi, and two years is time enough for garments to lose their color and look *meskeen*."

"Yes, they look *meskeen*, to be sure," d'Ornano resumed with a gravity which caused everybody to roar. "But it must have been a good bargain at the time. Thou didst not steal the garments, by any chance? No? All right. Answer my question."

"What question, Sidi?"

"Where didst thou go this evening?"

"Oh! I went to the Hamam."

D'Ornano looked at General de Diolie with widening eyes.

"Why!" he said. "This is Wednesday, isn't it?"

"Yes, Wednesday."

"By Jove! And this fellow tells us he is coming back from the Public Baths. This is women's day."

The thing was so enormous that even Gisèle forgot to smile. She looked with increasing wonder at the phenomenon who not only had dared undertake what not one man in twenty thousand would attempt, but who readily acknowledged the fact.

"Allah *kerim!*" ejaculated d'Ornano. "To the Hamam! But why? Surely thou didst not run such a risk for a pastime? How didst thou get out? They must have compelled thee to undress before entering the *beïtoul*."

Sidi-Malik shook his head in denegation.

"No, Sidi. I learned what I wanted without having to go so far."

Gisèle had risen. They all left the table and passed into the adjoining room. Ali brought the coffee. He was then ordered to lead the negro to the kitchen and give him food. Sidi-Malik, nothing daunted, sat himself cross-legged in the middle of the rug. D'Ornano pushed towards him

the hexagonal stool on which coffee was steaming in tiny cups.

"Here," he said, "take some *khaoua*, and tell us what prompted thee to take such a chance. All who are here can be trusted. I take it that thou wert after information of some kind. Didst thou go to the Hamam to learn anything connected with the conversation we had last night?"

"Judge for thyself, Sidi," the camel-driver answered. "A woman of the harem told me that an attempt to poison the Sultan was made yesterday afternoon. A eunuch has been bowstrung for it. This is the third attempt of this kind in two weeks. What shall we do? Muley-Hassan will die unless I can speak to the Resident General."

D'Ornano exchanged a look with his chief. The General asked sharply:

"Who are those who have an interest in seeking Muley-Hassan's life?"

"The Senussiya. Who else, Sidi?"

"Why? When Muley-Hassan dies, the French will put whom they will please in his place; and they will take care that his successor is not an enemy. The Senussiya know this."

"They know it, Sidi. Everybody in Moghrib knows that Muley-Aziz is in the French school and will come home so full of the strength of the Rumis that when he becomes sultan he will do just as the Rumis tell him. But Moghrib knows, too, that old Muley-Hassan does not like the Nazarenes. He is useless now; but his death can serve a purpose. If he is found dead, one morning, the Senussiya will say that the French poisoned him in order

to put their friend Muley-Aziz in his place. Then every man in Moghrib will take arms to uphold the right of Abd-er-Rhaman. Abd-er-Rhaman is the true and only Commander of the Faithful."

"Of whom is he speaking?" the General asked of d'Ornano with a look of surprise. "Not Abd-er-Rhaman the son of Mustapha-el-Murthadi, surely?"

"The same," answered the Captain. "And the very leader of men whose existence you denied earlier in the evening. You are all witnesses that I did not invent him. As Muley-Hassan has always been looked upon as a usurper, it follows that Abd-er-Rhaman is the true and only Commander of the Faithful."

"Perhaps he is," the General went on. "But it is nearly twenty years since his family ceased to reign, and that's a very long time. What do the Senussiya propose to do? Abd-er-Rhaman is to-day a sirdar in the army of the Khedive and he is stationed on the Syrian border. The English would keep him a prisoner in Egypt if there was trouble in Morocco."

Here Sidi-Malik interrupted.

"Who says they will?"

"I say so," snapped the General. "The English would fear that an insurrection in Moghrib would spread to Egypt and perhaps to India. The Senussiya are a pack of fools. They forget that four nations have their eyes on Abd-er-Rhaman—the French, the Italians, the Russians and the English."

"And who is Abd-er-Rhaman's jailer, Sidi?"

"Sir Robert MacDonald, British Consul-General in Egypt. Is that enough?"



Sidi-Malik appeared to be convulsed by sudden and silent mirth. His glance betrayed an unspeakable contempt.

"*Ya illah il Allah!*" he chuckled. "Then thy Sir Roobeert Magdounal is the big fool, Sidi. . . . Abd-er-Rhaman is in Moghrib."

Leyton saw the General, Gisèle and d'Ornano exchange a glance of surprise. The Captain exclaimed:

"What's that?"

"I say that Abd-er-Rhaman is in Moghrib, Sidi. He was in Kairwan last week. To-day he must be in Marakesh. . . . No, I am not insane, *Akh Arbi!* It has been a long time since I told thee that I expected his coming. I will let thee know to-morrow before nightfall where he can be found. Already have I posted people to watch every gate. I will see him to-night."

"Where?"

"At the Kutubia, where else? If he is to be seen anywhere, he will certainly be in the mosque. The Senussiya meet at nine o'clock."

D'Ornano looked at his chief, then at Leyton.

"What if I went with him?" he asked of the General. "I might take your nephew along as a witness. The sight of the crowd he will meet there will be for him a novel experience." Then, seeing both men nod in approval: "Here, Sidi-Malik, there is no possibility of escape. Thou wilt either show me Abd-er-Rhaman, and, as a reward, General de Diolie will himself take thee to the Resident General, or thou wilt refuse, and two hundred strokes of the coorbash will punish the double-faced traitor. Is it yes or no?"

"Am I a Jew that I cannot be trusted? It is yes, Sidi; if thou art willing to take the risk."

"We will take the risk. What kind of ceremony shall we have to go through?"

"At the door, it will be necessary to give the password. This is easy. I will teach you the signs of recognition and that will be all. A *khouan* of the Senussiya is supposed to know many secret things; but there will be many strangers there. Moreover, in case you should be challenged, I will step in and put the questions myself."

"And we shall be able to speak to Abd-er-Rhaman?"

"We might make bolder than speak to him, Inshallah!" the camel-driver answered enthusiastically. "I will think of a plan. We shall provide ourselves with revolvers and knives, and Anoun-Dialo, the negro who came with me, will accompany us. He is very strong."

"And what is the password?"

"The word to night is 'Allah's sword is in Okba's hand. The horse that goes towards sunset was bred in the Syrian Desert.' The gate-keeper will tell us the first part of the sentence. We will have to give him the rest."

"What does the sentence mean?"

"It means what it says, Sidi. Abd-er-Rhaman was stationed on the Syrian border. He came into Moghrib, which is the country of sunset. Likewise, Okba the Conqueror came from Syria, and drove the unbelievers before him. Abd-er-Rhaman is Okba, and he is also the horse. Allah gave him the sword of victory. There is no other meaning."

D'Ornano looked at Gisèle. Both of them laughed.

CHAPTER III

"THE HORSE THAT GOES TOWARDS SUNSET"

The man who leaves his native city at seventeen and comes back at thirty-eight is apt to indulge in recollections. But when this man, an outlaw, compelled by the vigilance of the police to assume the disguise of a despised mountaineer of the Bled-es-Sibla, enters the capital on foot, behind a donkey loaded with charcoal and thuya wood, his thoughts are likely to be interesting; especially if he entertains the design of stepping into the shoes of the usurper who, to deprive him of a throne, has had recourse to the classical cup of bad coffee so easily concocted by the Borgias of Islam.

Twenty-one years before, six months after his father, Mustapha-el-Murthadi, had become sultan, Abd-er-Rhaman had left Morocco with Khaïd McLeland, the commander of the Imperial Guard, and had taken the Gibraltar boat for Southampton. His goal was Sandhurst, where it had been decided between McLeland and his father that he should spend three years training himself for modern warfare. At the English military academy he evinced little that was remarkable, save perhaps a proficiency in polo. This was, no doubt, due to the fact that European clothes fit a Moslem a little tight at first, and that it takes some time to forget that one is the son of one's

father. But he managed to keep on a level with his class, and he even graduated without having to put in motion other influences than good behavior and quiet work.

Up to this time, he had failed to astonish the world. But he gave the measure of his capacities eight months after he left school, in Somaliland, where English and Italians were jointly campaigning. As a second lieutenant in the Camel Corps, he obtained guides where none apparently were to be found, and succeeded in recovering one hundred camels and eight hundred head of cattle which had been stampeded, driven through seventy-odd miles of practically unknown mountain land and there coralled by the Somalis. The feat decided his future. He had taken part in the expedition for the sake of experience, and in order to see war machinery in motion before going back to his native land; but his father, the victim of a palace clique, died of poison a few days after the rumor of the young man's performance had found its way into English papers. Even then Abd-er-Rhaman would have returned home. But he learned in Ismailia, where the P. & O. liner which carried him stopped to coal, that the French had successfully exerted their influence in favor of his uncle Muley-Hassan, whose dangerous prodigality they planned to feed as the usurer feeds the spendthrift whom he will ruin when the victim comes into his inheritance.

He remained in the service of the Khedive. His moderation and common sense were at that period of the kind that do not even invite commentary. He forbore from speaking of his grievances, even in the strictest confidence, and he apparently confined all his attention to military affairs.

That nobody ever heard him mention his troubles was as well known to the Khedive as to Sir Robert MacDonald, the new British Consul General. However, what some attributed to fatalism and calm resignation went with others by another name. The Khedive laughed, at any rate, when Ismail Bey reported to him a conversation in the course of which Sir Robert MacDonald had been heard to speak of Abd-er-Rhaman as "a decent young fellow, so thoroughly Anglicized that he took pride in the uniform bestowed upon him by King Edward!" This was undoubtedly a bit off the mark, and meant only for English ears—Sir Robert MacDonald was new to Egypt, and had not yet been afforded an opportunity to correct the views he held in regard to many things; but it worked out well for Abd-er-Raman, who was transferred to India and made a Captain in a regiment of Gourkha cavalry. His luck followed him. He was allowed to share the scant glory and very real dangers of one of the so-called petty wars the Empire finds itself compelled to wage periodically against the restless Moslem states of the north-western border, and he came back with the Victoria Cross.

He remained in India eight years, enjoying at Simla something tantamount to sanatorium popularity. Men praised his liberality, bravery, intelligence and horsemanship; women his birth, his subtle understanding of things Oriental and the good looks he inherited from a Circassian mother. But all felt that he kept at a distance, growing, as years were flowing by, more reticent, less in sympathy with the European and fonder of the native. Nobody, however, thought of attributing this change in his demeanor

to a repressed ambition that was fast becoming restless; and when, after the Borneo undertaking, he left Ceylon for a change of climate that had become imperative, he was sent back to Egypt as a lieutenant-colonel.

Again five years went by, years of monotonous quiet. Sandhurst school-mates had ceased to speak of the silent Abd-er-Rhaman, now sunk to the level of the beys, emirs and pashas who screened the Khedive from the Foreign Colony and helped him to forget that Egypt had fallen into the hands of the Unbelievers. In South Africa, a cloud broke into a hail of hissing bullets, and troops were rushed. Abd-er-Rhaman went back to Cairo a sirdar.

It soon became evident, however, that the appointment was a mistake. He gave away, to be distributed among the students of El-Kasar, Cairo's famous Faculty of Theology, the five thousand pounds sterling the British Parliament had voted him as a donative. The incident did not fail to bring forth interesting comments on the part of the British Press; but the alarm was not really sounded until the Paris *Matin* learned from a member of the Algerine native police that Abd-er-Rhaman had long since joined the Brotherhood of the Senussiyya, and warned the British Lion to be watchful.

The revelation upset somewhat Sir Robert MacDonald's confidence in the loyalty of his protégé. It was, it is true, a little late. The Khedive refused steadfastly to let Abd-er-Rhaman go to India where a few English gentlemen wisely thought they had better send him. What bond existed between the new Sirdar and the Khedive was a momentous question, propounded, not only in Cairo's

European colony, but in London, in Paris and even in Rome. Constantinople and Berlin probably possessed better information; at all events they acted as if they did. As a consequence, it was not without some feeling of ennui that it was noticed in diplomatic circles immediately after rebellion broke out afresh among Russia's Moslem subjects in Transcaucasia, that the whole of Islam was stirred to its very depths and that the Senussi were active from Peishawur to Cape Spartel.

The Kaiser chose this moment to play his favorite game of bull in the china shop. The socialists were giving him some trouble at home, and he deemed it necessary to turn the attention of the German nation towards external affairs. To feel the pulse of the world, he had recourse to the plan that had never failed him in such hours. "Twist the British Lion's tail when in doubt. He will tell you what to do and won't be aware of your twisting." That he was ready to push Turkey forward was well known. But Britain, this time both awake and distrustful, upset the War Lord's plan by a clever counter-move. Backed by her fleets, the Italians occupied Tripoli and the French rushed troops to Marakesh. War was averted—for a while. Sir Robert MacDonald received strict orders to keep close watch on the Sirdar, but this to little purpose. Abd-er-Rhaman was too wary to commit himself, and he had spies where they were needed. The rest was not so much in his hands as in those of his partisans. One day assurance reached him that all in Morocco was ready for his coming. He then planned and carried out the flight that took him, in twelve days, when all were in total ignorance of his departure, from the shores of the Atbara River, where he

was supposed to have gone after big game, to the city he had not seen in twenty years.

The district he was now treading had seen little change. Marakesh-el-Bali, the old Marakesh, had just as narrow streets and was as ill-smelling as it had been in the days of Mustapha-el-Murthadi. It was dusk and rain threatened. Thunder had been heard all the afternoon, and drops of tepid water were beginning to streak the limewash of the house fronts. Before him, the street, crossed by arches and interrupted by stairways, tumbled down towards the Tensift River. In places, the paving had disappeared, and the sandstone blocks, carried along by the rush of water of the last storm, now lay in the ditch which occupied the middle of the street. This surface sewer was choked with refuse. Marakesh's inhabitants, who allowed the waters to take away the flag-stones of their stairways and sometimes the roofs of their dwellings, relied altogether on rain to rid them of the offal storks had left as too cumbrous or too nauseating.

With the exception of minor details, all houses were alike. White was the predominating color; but in some cases orange, pink and even an ugly indigo tint had been added to the limewash. Unless mention should be made of mucharabiehs with painted awnings, of small apertures in the form of a trefoil, of heavy oak doors with lock, bars and hinges of wrought iron, of bloody hand-prints left on the walls by the women and children of the household to warn away the evil eye, nothing broke the uniformity of the frontages. Not far away, under a crumbling arch, the snoring music of tom-tom, fife and derbukkha came

through the low doorway of a Moorish coffee-shop. Lying on the bare earth, bundled in filthy burnous, Berbers with shaven scalps were asleep, drunk with hasheesh. They were crowded into an incredible mix-up, in the astonishing attitudes Eastern beggars, who enjoy the gift of moulding themselves to all fixtures, and who manage to attain comfort where a dog would find it hard to stand, are quite alone in assuming.

Abd-er-Rhaman peeped inside. A gesture he made caught the eye of the derbukkha player, who got up, left the shop and joined him. The scars left by instruments of torture on his body branded him an Aissaoui, an affiliated member of the most mysterious of all the religious sects whose federation composed the Senussi body politic. He followed the Pretender a little way up the street.

When they parted, five minutes later, the Aissaoui went down towards the Mechouar. Abd-er-Rhaman retraced his steps and entered the coffee-shop. He had yet three hours to spend before the time when the vaults of the Kutubia would fill with Senussiya, and this low shop was safer than the street. The three soldi he handed to a barefoot boy bought him three tiny cups of coffee, which he sipped leisurely. He then wrapped himself in his burnous, turned against the wall and went to sleep.

The *khaouadji* awoke him at the appointed time. It was raining harder as he left the shop. Save for a few khouans who, like himself, were bound for the Kutubia, the unlighted streets were deserted. The forbidding mosque was near by. At the door he gave the password, left his babooshes in charge of a thick-lipped mulatto, and lost himself in the crowd of the Faithful.

He made his way towards the piscina. Bronze lanterns hung from the pendentives of the arches and torches were burning against the columns. Their red and smoky glare lent to the scene a touch of weirdness. In the centre of the mosque Aissaoua were performing. There were at least two hundred of them, dancing solemnly, hand in hand, with guttural exclamations. Beggars and snake-charmers, who had spent in the mosque the major portion of their day, had taken the best places. It was a silent crowd that watched the performance. All the types of the north African races, from the Tuaregg of Sahara to the Moor of the coast cities, and from the Haratin to the Krumir, were to be met in this congregation. Jews and Christians were, of course, absent, but still specimens of some thirty different types of humanity elbowed each other under the arcades. According to their customs and occupations, they could be classified in three distinct categories: the Berbers, the Moors and the Arabs. The negroes and half-breeds, according to the same classification, were reckoned as belonging to either category.

For three-quarters of an hour, as long as the performance of the Aissaoua lasted, Abd-er-Rhaman kept on moving from column to column. He spoke to no one and no one seemed to notice him. At last the call of the muezzin, announcing that it was time for the *salat*, fell from the minaret. The circle around the Aissaoua broke at the first words. Divested in a twinkling and showing all the degrees of uncleanness, five hundred people plunged into the bathing-pool. As fast as they came out others took their places. The nave of the mosque resounded with the nasal lullaby of five thousand people repeating the first Surat.

"God is God and Mohamed is the prophet of God. There is but one God—my God. Glory be rendered to Allah the most great, and Allah the victorious, whose prophet is Mohamed."

Abd-er-Rhaman's glance fell on a gigantic negro at his side. He knew him at once for a Yolof from Senegal. A new convert, he thought. His faith seemed built on firmer ground than his knowledge of Arabic. He gave the Titan a passing glance of admiration; but he failed to notice that two men, one at each side of him, were closely watching all his movements. He resumed his garments and left the vicinity of the piscina, directing his steps towards a narrow staircase that led into the mosque's crypt. D'Ornano, Sidi-Malik and their burly companion followed him.

Twenty minutes passed by, and the door closed on the last Senussi. All told, only one-fifth of the crowd that filled the mosque had descended into the crypt. These Khouans were for the most part men who enjoyed more or less influence in the various communities which had sent them. Some were only *hadjis* on whom a pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina had conferred the envied privilege of conducting worship whenever no mullah or iman was at hand. Others were *Marabouts* and *Shorfa*—revered members of hereditary ecclesiastical families. Some—pure Arabs—were chiefs of great tents and lorded it over a *zmala* of nomads. The main body was composed of students and professors of the Kutubia's College of Theology. But the most powerful of all were the *Mokkadem*s and the chiefs of *zaouias*. The first could be likened to the autocratic bishops of the early Christian times; the last, bearing a striking resemblance to the power-

ful abbots of the warlike middle ages, exercised an absolute power over the members—Khouans—of some religious brotherhood and were the real barons of the land. The balance were a small fry of secret agents, Aissaoua,* or men who, like Sidi-Malik, had no recognized influence, but whose usefulness consisted in their ability to pry into secrets not their own. D’Ornano, thoroughly coached by his companion, had assumed the character of such a secret agent. Leyton had been left outside to await developments.

If the Corsican and the camel-driver had entertained any doubts as to the identity of Abd-er-Rhaman, these were lifted when they saw him join the mosque’s clergy and be received by them with marks of respectful deference. However, very few words were exchanged. The observation d’Ornano made, that only a very small circle within the mosque’s caves seemed aware of the Pretender’s presence, strengthened in no small degree his determination to make the bold attempt suggested by Sidi-Malik. For an hour he listened to the reports of the different agents. One man, sent by the Andjera tribe, announced that a number of Riffian communities had made a truce that bound them to keep the peace and respect each other’s crops until the end of the coming conflict. An envoy from the Zimour confederacy declared that, provided an extension of territory was granted, his tribe would take the field with one-third more men than requested. Another—d’Ornano started when he saw that the speaker who had arisen

* The plural of Aissaoui is Aissaoua. Senussi, Senussiya; Sheriff, Shorfa; Targui, Tuaregg; alem, ulema. In Arabic the plurals are very irregular.

at the other end of the cave was no other than Sidi-Malik—volunteered the information that he possessed the names of all the Jews in Marakesh in whose homes ready cash would be found. A fourth said that Bou-Amel, the Saharan, was ready to enter the field and had already begun the preaching of a Holy War. When he withdrew, an Algerine *kouloughi*, who represented himself as a deserter, asserted that the men of two native regiments garrisoned at Tlemcen were preparing to mutiny, and would do so as soon as Abd-el-Khader, Captain of the Fifth Company, Second Tirailleurs, would see fit to order the massacre of the French officers. The two regiments would then march across the border to Oujda, and would hold the town long enough against the Foreign Legion of Sidi-Bel-Abbès to give time to the Riffian and Beni-M'Gill tribes to come to their assistance. D'Ornano made careful mental note of this report, swearing inwardly that it would not be his fault if the said Abd-el-Khader was not checked in his career of mutiny by a wall, a blindfold and twelve bullets, all within forty-eight hours. Other individual bits of information came to light. But, curiously enough, none of the men who could be credited with holding in their hands the strings of the organization spoke. The Corsican began to suspect that the meeting was faked. He had thought that questions would be as freely debated among the Khouans as among the members of European secret societies whose meetings are held on a parliamentary plan; but it was now evident that all this comedy was engineered solely with the view of impressing the tribal envoys with the fact that something was being done. The plan of campaign lay higher up, and would, he knew, be kept

carefully concealed. He was confirmed in this belief by the words of the Kutubia's iman, who came forward to announce that every man might now go back to his tribe and tell those who believed that preparations were now complete. Before the end of another fortnight an event would take place that would give to the Faithful a sign that the time had now come to mount their horses and load their guns.

CHAPTER IV

RUNNING THE GAUNTLET OF SENUSSIYA

Suddenly the meeting broke up. Sidi-Malik made his reappearance as the Corsican, preparing to leave the cave with the crowd, was wondering what step it would be advisable to take next. The outcome of the whispered conference which ensued was that d'Ornano hurried up-stairs after Leyton. The painter had spent all this time studying the crowd and the surroundings. He had wandered away so far that d'Ornano had some difficulty in finding him. What the young Captain told *sotto voce* made the American straighten up as he realized that he would now be called upon to act his part. They went together to the mosque's door. The Corsican remained outside, in the dim light shed by the bronze lantern that hung from the keystone of the arch. Leyton ran until he reached a side street. An arch overhung it. A dilapidated lantern was burning there, but a stone soon did away with the inconvenience. Left in complete darkness, the painter concealed himself behind the projection of a pillar supporting the arch and waited.

A quarter of an hour, twenty minutes ebbed slowly away. At the end of that time he became suddenly aware that Sidi-Malik and his dusky companion had taken shelter behind the opposite pillar. He first made sure that the

street was deserted, then he asked with lowered voice if the man was coming.

"Yes, the man is coming, Sidi," came the guarded answer. "But he has suspicions. Stay here. Anoun-Dialo and I will soon be back."

The bold scheme involved nothing less than the kidnapping of Abd-er-Rhaman. After d'Ornano had left the cave, Sidi-Malik had gone to the Sirdar and taken him aside under pretence of imparting to him a piece of confidential information. His game had been simple. To avoid unnecessary beating around the bush, and perhaps dangerous questions, he had merely slipped into the Pretender's hand, affecting as much dull stupidity as he could command, two clippings from *La Vie Illustrée*, which d'Ornano had obtained that afternoon at the officers' mess. One of the clippings was a half-tone reproduction of a photograph showing Abd-er-Rhaman in sirdar's uniform. The other bore the likeness of the German ruler with this legend:

Frederick Wilhelm, imperator rex.

Taken by surprise, Abd-er-Rhaman had rapidly glanced at the pictures. He had then torn them to pieces with the formula of execration used by Arabs when witnessing a break of the religious rules. He had quoted to Sidi-Malik the *surat* of the Koran forbidding the reproduction of human and animal likenesses, and had asked him severely if he had seen what he had brought.

"Verily I did, Protector of the Poor," the camel-driver answered with affected nervousness. "A stranger stopped me at the mosque's entrance and showed me the pictures. Be he cursed for his sin, and I forgiven for mine by the

Presence! These are the words the stranger said, Sidi: 'A man is in Stamboul who has a brother here; and his brother looks like him. This is the picture of the Stamboul brother. Go! Sherib Effendi is my name. Tell the Marakesh brother that I am sent by the man who sells guns in Stamboul. This is the picture of the man who sells guns in Stamboul.' Then he gave me this likeness and told me to put it in my left hand so that it would not get mixed with the Stamboul brother. Forgive, Sidi. I am the Meskeen."

Abd-er-Rhaman, whose suspicions had been aroused by the sight of his photograph, breathed a sigh of relief. Somebody, he thought, has used the Meskeen—the Humble—who appeared to be at the same time an idiot of the finest water, as an instrument to convey some message. It was quite evident that the Meskeen had been told of the existence of an imaginary brother solely for the purpose of concealing from him the identity of the man he was to seek. But why this portrait of the German Emperor? The Presence pondered a minute and decided, at the end of a mile of rapid Oriental deductions, that Frederick Wilhelm, who was in close relations with Yildiz Kiosk, was evidently the Stamboul dealer in guns who had appeared so unexpectedly in the Meskeen's unintelligible speech. It followed that Sherib Effendi's errand was one related to guns, alias to war. Possibly he came to speak of the heavy contraband in arms and ammunition German firms, subsidized by their government, were carrying on with the Moorish coasts. At all events the man who knew that Abd-er-Rhaman was in Moghrib would bear watching. The Presence directed the Meskeen to lead

him to Sherib Effendi, making the benighted idiot feel like the angler who has landed a heavy fish.

At the door they found d'Ornano. The Corsican addressed the Pretender in Arabic.

"Peace be with thee," he salaamed. "Art thou the man I am seeking?"

Abd-er-Rhaman had not come without a plan of his own. Desirous to ascertain whether the so-called Sherib Effendi was not a spy, he had made silent preparations to take him a prisoner and keep him in the Kutubia until his story had been tested. In answer, he let the cowl of his burnous fall on his shoulders.

"I am one of two men," he said. "It is for thee to tell which one. What is thy message? Speak quickly. I came here to question, not to answer."

His tone caused the Corsican to become acutely conscious of the difficulty of his position. Behind the Sirdar's back, Sidi-Malik made a grimace in which he read all the necessity there was to be watchful. He noticed at the same moment that, at the mosque's entrance, men, whom he rightly took for Senussiya, were looking in their direction. He had been trifling with a hornet's nest, it appeared. Yet he was sure that Leyton, Anoun-Dialo and Sidi-Malik were at work. The best plan for him was to wait for his cue, meanwhile remembering that language was not given to man to express his thoughts but to conceal them.

"Thou art Abd-er-Rhaman," he said simply.

He observed with admiration that not a muscle twitched in the Pretender's face. His interlocutor nodded.

"Yes, I am Abd-er-Rhaman," he admitted. "Who art thou?"

"I go by the name of Moritz Shoerb, and I am a German diplomat. I was once *Attaché d'Ambassade* in Constantinople. As the boatmen of the Golden Horn called me Sherib Effendi, I came to Marakesh under that name. But I come, this time, directly from Paris."

"To what purpose?"

"The Ambassador received telegraphed orders from Berlin to send a trusted agent to Marakesh with instructions to await thy coming. I am to deliver some papers into thy hand. Might we not find a secluded spot in the mosque where we could speak of this?"

"No. I believe it would be risky, Mr. Shoerb. The mosque is full of people. You can deliver the papers here."

Abd-er-Rhaman had spoken French. D'Ornano could do no more than guess his purpose. He was careful to betray the slightest indication of foreign accent and hesitancy as he answered in the same tongue:

"I am to inform you that a receipt will have to be given in exchange. I must also make sure that this is not a case of mistaken identity. Why not in the mosque, your Highness? A word with the iman will convince me beyond the possibility of a doubt that you are indeed Abd-er-Rhaman, and we shall find there paper and ink."

The request was mere bluff. He had ascertained, among other things, that Abd-er-Rhaman, deluded by his instant readiness to deliver forged papers, believed his story and wished to avoid the crowd. He attempted to resume the offensive by the affected carelessness with which he spoke aloud the name of the Pretender. The result of this inspiration was immediate. People were coming in their

direction. They were near enough to have overheard, he thought. Abd-er-Rhaman thought so, too, which was precisely the point the Corsican had tried to gain. The Sirdar caught him by the arm.

"Follow me, Mr. Shoerb," he said. "And do not speak so loudly if you value my incognito and your own. We shall have to wait in darkness a little while. I would suggest that you forget my name for the present."

"I beg your pardon, your Highness. I never meant——"

"Yes, I know. Come! Over there we will run less risk."

He entered the passage in which Sidi-Malik and Leyton had disappeared. D'Ornano had not bargained for so much. Abd-er-Rhaman, thinking that so long as the mosque remained within sight he had his interlocutor at his mercy, evidently felt that he still stood on solid ground. He asked what the papers contained.

"Oh, I could not tell you, your Highness," the Corsican replied. "They were sealed in private by the Ambassador himself. Although it is an open secret at the Embassy——"

Abd-er-Rhaman interrupted him with a brief gesture. Anoun-Dialo, coming back from the passage, had brushed past them. The Captain's blood ran faster. His cue was coming and all was well.

At this moment, Abd-er-Rhaman happened to remember that a passage leading into the caves of the Kutubia opened into the grain market. This passage, seldom used, ought to be accessible on the night of a Senussiya meeting, he thought. He resolved to take it to reenter the mosque. D'Ornano followed.

The sequel came quickly. They had gone but a few

steps, when two men sprang from the shadow. D'Ornano felt his companion's knife graze his ribs just in time to fall back. Sidi-Malik already had the Pretender by the throat. Leyton had caught him by the wrist and was now searching his belt for weapons. The Captain recovered his wits in time to help the American snatch a *fissa* from Abd-er-Rhaman's grip. He heard steps behind, and, turning, beheld Anoun-Dialo coming back at a run. At this moment Sidi-Malik succeeded in flooring his opponent. But as he fell on top of the Pretender his elbow struck the ground heavily. He let go. Abd-er-Rhaman, now free from pressure, uttered at once the call for help in use among Senussiya.

It availed him little. His weapons were in his opponent's hands, and Anoun-Dialo, who now had charge of the case, was displaying a vigor there was no possibility of resisting. He picked up the fallen Sirdar as a grown man would pick up a child. With one hand, a paw large enough to cover the whole of the Pretender's face, he kept him from renewing his outcry; with the other he seized him by the ankles. He then lifted him and placed him on his shoulder, carrying him exactly as a hunter carries a dead antelope. D'Ornano proceeded to tie the prisoner's wrists with a belt. He had just succeeded in accomplishing his purpose when Sidi-Malik yelled at the pitch of his voice:

"*Aroua! Aroua mena, fissa!*—Come! Come with me, quick!"

It seemed to Leyton, who turned at the warning, that Hell was vomiting its inmates. He did not stop to catch more than a glimpse of the scene, but, with blood chilled

and ears ringing, he followed Sidi-Malik at a run. Senussi deviltry had taken the trail. In the space lighted by the mosque's lanterns he had seen a flood of Moslems surge forward. The shriek uttered by Abd-er-Rhaman had been taken up by twenty throats, and now the Kutubia poured the whole of its contents into the adjoining streets. Five thousand men were on their track.

A glance right and left assured him that his companions were present and unharmed. They followed Sidi-Malik to the end of the cul-de-sac. A door had been opened there by the camel-driver a few minutes before. All of them and the prisoner tumbled down rough steps into total darkness. Sidi-Malik locked the door. D'Ornano told Leyton that they were inside the grain market.

They stood there a second, keeping still in the darkness. The pursuers reached the bottom of the cul-de-sac and began pounding upon the door with yells of rage. Sidi-Malik spoke again.

"*Aroua!*" he said. "They will think of the door opening into the Kutubia's caves and will get the key from the iman. Besides, there will be others who will try to overtake us by running around the ward. They will be here in a minute. We must go. Take care of the pillars!"

Their progress was slow in the darkness. This grain market, an improved form of the *matmorah*, was built entirely below street level, in the fashion of a cistern. The vaults were so low that Leyton could reach the ceiling with his hand. The air was not only foul, damp and permeated with the scent of fermented grain, but the dust particles kept in suspension by the atmosphere of all such warehouses were irritating in the extreme. At the end of

two minutes the painter succumbed to an overwhelming desire to cough.

"Hush!" warned Sidi-Malik. "Men sometimes sleep here, Sidi. Always beware of the stranger who lies still in the darkness. Hurry, or we will not be able to escape. Remember that every man, woman and child in Marakesh-el-Bali is a foe to-night. *Fissa! Fissa!*"

He added five seconds later:

"The city gates will be closed. We may have to enter the Kasbah by swimming. If we do so, the Senussiya will attach the Kasbah at once. Can the French soldiers be called from the Kasbah, Sidi d'Ornano?"

As he spoke, Leyton became aware of a source of light behind his back. The stocky pillars in front of him, dimly illumined, cast weird dancing shadows on the floor. Sidi-Malik did not even take the trouble to turn. He seized Leyton by the hand.

"*Aroua!*"

Behind them, the door that led into the Kutubia's caves had opened. A demoniacal yell warned them that their presence in the grain market had been discovered. The race began again. Twenty torches were now illuminating the crypt. This helped them to some extent, as they could see their way, but it helped their pursuers still more. Sidi-Malik stopped d'Ornano, who, his revolver cocked and raised, made ready to turn and shoot.

"Not now, Sidi!" he said. "Keep thy cartridges. Twenty men behind us are less danger than one in front. If thy friend's strength does not give out, we can keep running for a long time. They have only knives. Keep the bullets!"

Leyton assured him laughingly that he too could run, boasting that he had won in intercollegiate long-distance contests. The only answer that the information elicited was:

"Very good, Sidi Leïtoun. Thou wilt need running. Keep thy breath!"

The painter reddened under the rebuke. He kept silent, however, as a sharp pain in his soles had just made him realize that Sidi-Malik's forebodings of disaster were perhaps justified. He could run, of course, as an American college man, who has enjoyed the benefit of scientific training on the campus, can run. But he was now running barefoot, having discarded his Moorish *zabats* at the first alarm; low, roomy, heelless shoes being worse than no shoes at all in a situation like this. And his soles were tender, while those of their pursuers were as tough as horn; these people being in the habit of wearing their shoes mostly as an ornament, hanging to a string passed around their necks. He knew, besides, that no white man, no matter how well trained, could hope to outrun a Moghrabi on more than two miles of uneven track. This underground grain market seemed a labyrinth without end. He wondered when and where they would again see the sky. The pursuers had ceased yelling, and the only noise breaking the silence of the cave was the rhythmical pounding of two hundred naked feet striking the cement floor with a sound similar to that produced by a beetle upon wet linen. He was running between d'Ornano and Anoun-Dialo, his blood beating a tattoo against his temples, short of breath and wondering how the Yolof could possibly endure this killing pace and the carrying of a grown man. Then he

became aware that a shadow, issued from behind a pillar, had crossed their path.

Anoun-Dialo, tackled at the knees, went sprawling, knocking the painter down. Before he had time to regain his feet, Leyton heard two shots. D'Ornano had been thinking and acting with the stupefying activity which was his characteristic. Wheeling around, he had effectually checked the career of the pursuers by two shots that did for them what the interference of the man behind the pillar had done for the fugitives. Two men of the first rank had fallen face downward. Stumbling on their prostrate bodies, three torch-bearers had followed, causing a general tumble. The fanatics who came behind had stopped, demoralized by the havoc. Nothing as yet had been conducive to the thought that Abd-er-Rhaman's kidnappers were armed with revolvers and were dead shots.

Leyton gazed stupidly around him. A man lay at his feet, disembowelled by Sidi-Malik's flissa. He recognized him for the man who had caused their fall and for an Aissaoui. Anoun-Dialo, apparently unharmed, was rising from the ground. But Abd-er-Rhaman was a free man! Before he could aim and fire, he saw the Pretender disappear behind a pillar.

All this had taken less than a minute. Sidi-Malik's curse, and d'Ornano's sharp command to resume their flight, brought the painter back to the painful facing of a desperate situation. Their hostage was now gone. A glance behind showed him that the Senussiya, recovering from their indecision, were again surging forward. The voice of the Pretender, coming from the darkness, assured

him that nothing but death awaited the Christian dogs who had dared break into a Senussi meeting. Evidently Abd-er-Rhaman would run to earth those who not only had fooled him, but were in a position to make his presence in Marakesh known to the French authorities. Urged by him, his partisans would leave nothing undone. The artist's heart sank at the thought that their only hope of escape was now centred in Sidi-Malik.

They were nearing the other extremity of the cave. He saw Sidi-Malik climb what appeared to be another flight of steps. D'Ornano, at the same moment, warned him to be ready to shoot whomsoever would attempt to impede their exit. A second later they were outside, in the rain, at the entrance of the Mechouar.

Noticing that the trap-door giving access to the passage swung upwards and could be closed, Leyton proceeded to fasten it. He saw at a glance that the wooden frame would not resist very long the combined efforts of their foes: yet minutes meant much in the present instance. He closed the panel and secured it by introducing the handle of a solid Spanish knife in the staple. He completed the operation not a minute too soon; the Senussiya were reaching the stairs. As he resumed an erect position, he met Sidi-Malik's approving glance. Enraged yells and a pounding of frantic fists, came from below. He flushed with pride. After all, neither d'Ornano nor Sidi-Malik had thought of closing the panel.

"Good, Sidi Leïtoun," said the camel-driver. "I thought of the trap-door, but the padlock is lost, and I forgot that a knife would do as well. This will hold them until the coming of the *beni-kelbi*, who are coming around

the square. *Aroua*, Sidi! When they reach this place we, shall be across the Mechouar."

They resumed their tramping. Leyton's soles did not hurt as badly now that their flight took them across seas of mud; but he was in constant fear of slipping. Sidi-Malik led them diagonally across the large piazza. They left it to enter dark, narrow and steep thoroughfares, criminal little streets deluged with storm water, which wound their way toward the ramparts.

A quarter of an hour passed by. They reached the dilapidated Moorish fortifications and followed them for some distance. Sidi-Malik's plan now was to leave Marakesh-el-Bali, cross the huerta, and reënter the European part of the town. Once there, they would be in comparative safety. But to accomplish this successfully, they would have to run for another two miles. The camel-driver felt certain that d'Ornano and his American friend, unaccustomed to running barefoot, would be overtaken before they had covered half the distance. He thought of another plan.

The gates of the native city were now closed, but he knew the location of a breach in the walls. This they would use to escape into the huerta. They reached the hole as the Senussiya were again coming within hearing distance. The camel-driver passed first.

"Thou and thy friend had better wait here, Sidi," he told d'Ornano, when the Corsican joined him on the other side of the wall. "This is a good place, as the Senussiya will have to enter the hole one at a time. Thou wilt shoot them down. Anoun-Dialo and I will steal horses or *mehara*. It will be *mehara* if I can. Anoun-Dialo is too

heavy for a horse, and the mehara have better speed—*kif-kif* the smoke on the plains swept by fire.”

They were gone. Leyton felt thoroughly uncomfortable. The thought that the camel-driver had had recourse to this scheme to secure his own and his servant's escape, had struck him, and the suspicion clung to him in spite of his attempts to dismiss it. On the other side of the breach d'Ornano's voice broke the silence.

“How many cartridges have you, Leyton?”

“Six in the barrel and seven in my pocket, I believe.”

“That will do. These devils will be here in a minute. I will shoot first, and keep on shooting until I have emptied my revolver. Then you will begin. You had better come behind me or we might hit each other. Shoot them in the head. I will reload while you are busy. Above all, take your time. The place is good and we have twenty-three cartridges between us. If all goes well, we will clean out twenty of them and still have our knives. I hope that Abd-er-Rhaman will come first.”

“How long do you think we can hold out?” inquired the American.

“Oh, anywhere from twenty minutes to an hour. It depends on how fast they can think. They can't pass here; but they will, sooner or later, think of scaling the walls. They will then drop on us from above as thick, ripe and juicy as figs in September. Sidi-Malik will be back before that, I hope, and meanwhile we shall have some fun.”

“Where did Sidi-Malik go?”

“To the place where caravans stop when they reach the town at night and find all the gates closed. He and



Anoun-Dialo will go naked, so as not to make the dogs bark. You can trust them to steal something and come back in a hurry. Ah, here comes the gang now. Be quiet, keep awake and shoot straight, if you value your hide. Are you ready?"

"Yes. Are you?"

The bang of d'Ornano's revolver brought him the answer. A brown head had shown itself in the aperture. Too sick to shriek, the painter was now wiping off with his burnous human gray matter that covered his face. The body had fallen at his feet.

"One!" exclaimed d'Ornano. "*Bon sang de Dieu*, it's not pretty! . . . Come on! Brace up! What's the matter with you, Leyton? Did you mistake manslaughter for a girl's pastime? You will have to put up with that sort of thing or surrender your life, that's all. Look above! If you see any of these rascals on top of the wall, bring him down. Quick!"

The American moved unsteadily. To the silence that had followed the first report of d'Ornano's weapon now succeeded a tempest of furious exclamations. Dragged by the legs, the body of the first victim disappeared behind the wall. Then the Corsican's revolver spoke three times in quick succession. Leyton realized with a pang that his turn had come. D'Ornano stepped aside to reload.

"Keep cool, now," he said, "and show the brutes what you can do."

The painter did not need the admonition. To the first nervousness caused by the affray had succeeded the blood-boiling hatred, the itching desire to rip and tear, that preys upon any animal who sees himself at bay. There were

three minutes of comparative stillness. The Senussi were clearing the breach. Then he shot.

He shot four times in four minutes. The occupation was too absorbing to permit him to notice that on his right, perhaps a quarter of a mile away, Sidi-Malik and Anoun-Dialo had set a tent on fire to produce disorder, and were coming back with two camels. He shot a fifth time. The report of another weapon followed his and a body fell very near him. D'Ornano had just shot down a man who had succeeded in reaching the top of the rampart. At this moment something brushed past him. Caught under the arm and lifted bodily, he found himself sitting behind Anoun-Dialo, on the back of a mehari. D'Ornano had taken place behind Sidi-Malik.

Away they went. The Senussi were now rushing into the open. They were not to be feared any longer; but another foe had appeared. Horsemen were in pursuit of the camel thieves, and these had rifles. Leyton had had barely time to recognize Anoun-Dialo and assure himself that d'Ornano was safe, when he gave a shriek of pain and let his revolver fall. One of the horsemen had hit him in the shoulder.

When he recovered consciousness, Anoun Dialo, Sidi-Malik and the Corsican were gone. In their stead, Gisèle was at his side, and he was resting on the bed of red damask and green linen.

CHAPTER V

IN THE IMPERIAL GARDENS

It was two weeks later. They were three: the man, the woman and the moon. The imperial gardens were white with light, and the man was in the water to the neck, ready to duck and dive at the first alarm. It was close to three o'clock.

The woman, a mere child of sixteen, was unusually handsome, with beautiful locks of jet black hair and splendid eyes. The man was ugly. But Djeilma loved him for the light that shone in his eyes; because there was boldness and quizzical cynicism there. He was strong, as tricky as Polutlas Ullyses, and he thought as little of killing the man who had taken his money at a game of huckle-bones as of stealing the figs of his breakfast. A true Berber was he; and she the daughter of a Mingrelian jail-keeper of Ras-Beirut, a Caucasian in whose soul the treacherousness of Colchis' poisonous swamps allied itself to the fierceness of the prototype of her race, the Medea of the Golden Fleece. She and Sidi-Malik met in that place whenever the necessities of underhanded politics compelled the camel-driver to take his chance at being caught in the Sultan's Seraï. He usually made the journey in the company of a corpse or two. But corpses have on live men the superiority of not minding a quarter of a mile's

swim underground. Each time he took the perilous plunge, Sidi-Malik had to call to mind all he had learned of swimming during the two seasons he had acted as *howarti*—hippopotami-spearer—in the swift current of the Barh-el-Djemel river, in the highlands of Ouadaï.

"Who should know the news better than I," he said presently, with some show of irritation. "Praise be given to God, I am no fool! I was in the Kutubia's caves when the tiding-bearers came. I could tell it was an important message by the effect the news had on those who were admitted to share it. Now, why should the iman order aloud every Senussi to bring his friends in arms in the streets at twelve o'clock to-morrow, if the Franzawis had not suffered defeat a second time? I knew there was to be a fight; Sidi d'Ornano told me so."

"Have these Nazarenes become no good, that they can no longer win?" the woman asked contemptuously. "I hear daily of them being beaten. What will armed men do in the streets to-morrow?"

"Maybe there will be a revolt. Maybe the iman will go himself on top of the Kutubia's minaret and preach a Holy War."

"Inshallah!" she gasped. "But then he will preach for Abd-er-Rhaman! He will hail him by the name of Emir-el-Mumenin—Commander of the Faithful. They will come here and attack the Kasbah. They will kill Muley-Hassan and make us all prisoners!"

"They will," retorted Sidi-Malik. "But it will not avail thee to sound an alarm. The Franzawis have not enough troops to hold their own, and Muley-Hassan hates the bearers of bad tidings. *Mektoub rebib!* At the hour of

Durh to-morrow the iman will himself call the Faithful to the *salat*. He will tell them to nail Muley-Hassan's head to the Kasbah's gate, and to roast the Jews to make them tell where their money is concealed. Then will the true Moslems burn and plunder Marakesh-el-Djedid. They will kill the Rumis and keep their wives to themselves. For me, I am going away. I have long known that the Franzawis were thick-headed fools. Sidi d'Ornano is no fool, it is true; but he is alone. I told Sidi Leïtoun to go; but a woman has so weakened his mind that he has become *kif-kif burrico* and will not hear. Therefore I wash my hands. Muley-Hassan won't be here to give me money to-morrow, neither will the Sidi Governor. Kismet Ma'shallah! I am going."

He shrugged his shoulders philosophically. *Mektoub rebib!*—It was written. He had squeezed the lemon while there was juice; but he had all the time been aware that Destiny stood by, ready to play him some of her tricks. The discovery that his sources of supply were to be cut the next day was not enough to penetrate the armor of his fatalism. She eyed him narrowly.

"Where art thou going?" she asked.

"*Manarf*. Maybe I shall go to Sokoto; maybe to Tripoli. If there is to be war, caravans will come to Marakesh no longer and Tripoli will take all the trade. I shall go to Tripoli perhaps."

With this he again took to the water without even saying good-by. She called him back.

"I should like to go with thee to Tripoli," she said.

No smile betrayed his triumph; and the puzzling, dancing light in his eyes she could not read. He knew that her

heart's desire was to go back to Tripoli where she had lived before her unspeakable mother had sold her to a Moghrabi slave-dealer. He had no present intention of leaving Marakesh, at least without his share of the plunder; but women's whims must be humored. He had come purposely to decide her to profit by the upheaval that was to take place on the morrow to escape from the imperial harem. But he was too wary to speak his mind. He knew that she would then feel entitled to make her own terms, and he had bought and sold too many horses to foreclose a bargain that did not leave him the upper hand, with the moral satisfaction of having fleeced the other party to the deal.

"I cannot take thee," he resumed. "Thou canst not leave the Kasbah without an *arifa* or a eunuch, and I would be running too many risks."

"Has thy knife become dull while living with so many Franzawis, or has the fear of the Senussiya shorn thee of manhood, Sidi-Malik!" she snapped at him. "Moreover there is no need to kill, perhaps. An *arifa*, being a woman, is no great burden in a crowd; and I am still able to outwit a eunuch."

"Nevertheless it is a great risk to take for a woman who will not work. How can I take thee? I will have no title to show that thou art a slave. Neither will I be able to prove that thou art a wife. Thou wilt feel free to do as thou plearest, and . . ."

"I will not cost thee money, at any rate. A wife thou wilt have to buy, and if she is as beautiful as I am, thou wilt have to give a thousand dours to her father."

"True. But if I beat her, and she goes to the Cadi and

gets a divorce, all the money will be returned to me, and I can keep all her personal property besides. This is the law. I should like to take thee, nevertheless. Thou art like a rose in bloom, and I like the sweet perfume of thy breathing on my face; but these are indeed evil times. I shall have to travel fast, and women cannot stand fast camel-riding. If I tarry on the way, I will be robbed. Yet I could take thee, perhaps; . . . but what couldst thou do to help me?"

"I have already told thee that I would get rid of the eunuch."

"Is that all, Allah Kerim! A child could get rid of a eunuch easily enough. Shall I take unto myself a wife that will not bring me any goods? Many will be those who will share the plunder of the Kasbah to-morrow. . . . How can I provide for a woman when I am as poor as a *dokkar*? Tell grand eunuch Mustapha that there will be an upheaval at twelve o'clock."

"How can I?" she asked in surprise. "He will ask me how I learned of it. He knows that I have not left the harem since day before yesterday."

"Tell him a lie. Thou art able to use thy tongue, Bismillah! Make him believe thou hadst a dream. He might not believe at once that Abd-er-Rhaman has routed the Franzawis a second time, but I will start the report going in the Soukhs, and bazaar talk goes fast. Tell him to ask if it is not true that men are to be in arms in the streets before twelve o'clock. He will know that thy dream is a true one then, and he will be afraid."

"And what shall I do?"

"He will think of nothing but of his personal safety.

He and thee will leave the Kasbah together before the salat of twelve o'clock. He will be in disguise, but he will have all his gold in the folds of his belt. Tell him to ask me questions. Thou wilt find me selling amber beads under the fourth arcade, in the darkest corner of the Soukhs. Remember; under the fourth arcade, just before twelve o'clock. I will see that there is nobody there. All the merchants will pack up and leave the place as soon as I tell them that there is to be a Gazi. Mustapha is a fat fool. He will believe thee if thou sayest that the best hiding-place is the fourth arcade of the Soukhs."

He relaxed the grip he had on the root of a tree, kicked the bank and was gone. The swift current took him like a feather, tossing him here and there. Then a high wall, white with moonlight, blocked his way. At this point the stream resumed its underground course. He dived, for a minute and a half fighting blindly in the black waters. Then he went up again and made for the bank. The stream that watered the imperial gardens had emptied itself in the grand canal. He was in the huerta, not far from the cemetery of Abou-Kasaf.

He went to sleep on the curb of a noria well, and did not awake before eight o'clock, when Anoun-Dialo came to bring him garments, as was his wont each time his master took the plunge near the ghetto to reappear beyond the ramparts. He had two hours to spend in idleness before it became necessary for him to reënter the town and begin his day's work. He first ate some of the black barley bread, not wholly free from hull, half cooked and badly leavened, that natives always carry in the cowl of their burnous. The burnous is seldom free from vermin, but

this matters little. The life-long acquaintance of the Moghrabi with the by-products of uncleanness has made him so indulgent a room-mate that he has never recourse, when wishing to get rid of the pests, to harsher treatment than a half-hearted shake of his clothing.

After his meal he smoked a cigarette; then he challenged Anoun-Dialo to a bout of *rabah*. *Rabah* is a sort of North African savate. The good *rabah* fighter wheels around with the velocity of a dervish and usually lands his blow on the ribs or sternum of his adversary. One well-placed kick is generally sufficient to end a bout, but Sidi-Malik had found in Anoun-Dialo an opponent who, for all his clumsiness, evinced such extraordinary powers of taking punishment that he had never been able fairly to knock him down. To the camel-driver, accustomed to win in nearly every contest of skill or strength, the giant was a puzzle. In wrestling bouts it took nothing short of a strangle hold or a foul to count him out; and he often won by dint of sheer strength. The Berber had had narrow escapes. Not that the Yolof was of rabid disposition when challenged, but because he often was unable to control the force of his blows. Anoun-Dialo was also past-master in two other games. As a swordsman, he boasted of his ability to sever a horse's neck at a single stroke of his two-handed Targui sabre, and he excelled at stopping with his skull the downward course of a stone, a sport much practised in Moghrab and responsible both for the extraordinary hardness of the North African skull and the great number of insane, idiots or mild lunatics who meet in Morocco the eye of the traveller.

The story of the negro was a curious one. He was the

eleventh son of a tribal chief of the upper Senegal. Having one day crossed the river to attempt some camel lifting, he had been made a prisoner by the Trarza Moors who congregate on the north bank of the river to gather, in the dry season, the crop of arabic gum of the thorny acacia trees. He had been kept as a hostage. On account of his birth, his prodigious strength and the facility with which he had learned to repeat the first surats of the Koran, he had soon won the friendship of his captors. One day the Trarza were attacked by Tuaregg who had covered on mehari's back one hundred and fifty leagues for the sole purpose of plundering a caravan which the Trarza were escorting. A pitched battle had taken place. Anoun-Dialo, fighting in the first rank, had been made a prisoner. He had crossed the whole of the Sahara behind the victors. He had been sold, in the oasis of Tuat, to a camel-driver who had taken him to Dar-el-Beida, then to Mogador. There he had eluded the vigilance of his master and had fled to Marakesh. Shortly before the entrance of the French into the town, he had fallen in with Sidi-Malik and had adopted him as a master. Naïvely he confessed his heart's desire and fixed the price of his faithfulness; the contemplation of his father's majesty having long since fired him with political aspirations.

"Now is thy chance to earn or steal many douros," he said. "Then we two go back to Soudan. With thy money and thy cunning, thou wilt become a great Sultan in Ouadai, Inshallah! Thou wilt make Anoun-Dialo a tribal chief. I will buy from thee powder, guns and cotton goods, and I will give thee bullocks, ivory, gum, ostrich feathers, kola beans, karité butter and gold dust."

After their bout of rabah the pair settled down for an hour and a half of kief. Kief, which means also hemp-smoking, means primarily loafing; that perfect farniente that North Africans have borrowed from the reptiles. The Italian lazzaroni may rival the immobility of a dog in the sunshine, but flies disturb or amuse him; the Moghrabi has studied the ways of the lizard. Sidi-Malik was not asleep, however, for promptly at ten o'clock he was up and ready. He ordered Anoun-Dialo to go and feed the camels—two of those they had stolen together, two weeks before—to load them and to wait for developments near the *kuba* of Bou-Said-Muttalib, on the road of Dar-el-Beida. He would join him there late in the afternoon and would bring a woman. As a *bassour*—a palanquin—would be necessary for her use, he would send one. Then, with arms bent, holding his cudgel behind his back in native fashion, barefoot, his low shoes beating a tattoo against his chest he started for the town at a small trot.

CHAPTER VI

GAZI

He began by a tour of the Mechouar. The Senussiya had not been idle, and the big piazza was already crowded with people. The invitation to congregate in arms in the streets had aroused curiosity, and conjectures as to its meaning were going fast. But, as it was yet too early for the iman's purpose, the Senussiya, while keeping alive the feeling of unrest, were careful to so multiply the number of explanations that the boldest were still irresolute. Sidi-Malik listened, made sure that the Kutubia was marshalling the movement and waited until eleven o'clock. Then he thought that this sort of thing had gone on long enough; he needed room and the Soukhs were still full. To get rid of the crowd, he told Habib, the rug merchant, that a servant of the Resident General had just reported to him a conversation that had passed between his master and an unknown party speaking through the telephone—might the curse of Allah silence all those who used the Mouthpiece of the Devil! Allah was again victorious. The First Chasseurs d'Afrique and a regiment of Disciplinaires had again been utterly routed by the Beni M'Gills of Abd-er-Rhaman. This fanciful piece of inside information had all the result he expected. Habib packed up. He had pledged himself to secrecy; but he told his brother, who told in turn his brother-in-law. The brother-in-law told

his cousin's cousin and his wife's nephew's son; with the result that, in less than twenty minutes, a hundred people, all pledged to secrecy by an oath sworn on the Zem-Zem waters or the beard of the Prophet, were at work; and the report that a Gazi was to be preached spread like wildfire from one end of the bazaars to the other. In half an hour it reached the Jewish Mellah whose gates instantly closed.

Isaac ben Levi, the filthiest and richest Jew in Marakesh, was already running like a deer, despite his gelatinous rotundity. A minute later he was making tearful salamalecs in front of Muley-Hassan. Muley-Hassan, although already drunk, was on the point of swallowing his fourth absinthe. He kicked the Jew; but he ordered an interpreter to ring up the Resident General. The Resident General was in the act of sitting down at table. He became as white as his napkin, and he roundly cursed the telephone operator for not giving him at once General de Diolie. The General called up Colonel Jalard of the Fourth Zouaves. Colonel Jalard resumed his boots with a grunt. He forgot his dinner, but in less than ten minutes he had his soldiers running.

By this time Djeïlma and Mustapha were in the streets. Sidi-Malik, laboring under the curse of sudden old age and blindness, was tremblingly spreading his beads on the floor, under the fourth arcade of the Soukhs. Another five minutes and the French soldiers reached Marakesh-el-Bali. The blind beggar recovered his sight long enough to see his Circassian mistress and the frightened Mustapha enter the bazaars. An "Allah Akbar" fell from somewhere. It was high noon.

Half a dozen minarets took up the call to the salat before

the Kutubia spoke. Then the old iman himself appeared at the top of the tower. His clear shrill voice went to the four corners of Marakesh-el-Bali.

"Allah Akbar!"

The effect was immediate. In the sun of Mechouar and of the housetops, in the blue shade of the narrow streets, one hundred thousand swarthy faces turned towards Mecca, the palms of two hundred thousand open hands went up near as many ears, and from one hundred thousand throats came the hoarse answer to the sacramental call.

"Allah Akbar!"

"Lah illah il Allah! Ya Saidna Muhamed rais ul Allah!" clarioned the voice from the tower.

The profession of faith came back like the buzz of a million bumblebees.

"Lah illah il Allah! Ya Saidna Muhamed rais ul Allah!"

"I, Hadj Ibrahim Muhamed, son of Bou-Said Mustapha, son of Eyoub," went on the iman, "I, the lineal descendant of Marabout Sidi-Daoud, I exhort, in Allah's name, the other muezzins to repeat my words, and I shorten the prayer as it is permitted by the Prophet on the days when the Faithful will engage in fight. Glory be rendered to the most High who chose me! Let all hearken! I am the bearer of a message. In the dark hours of the night I saw the radiant face of Muhamed."

The crowd below made a startled move. All looks, leaving the contemplation of an abstract point in the eastern sky, instantly radiated towards the tower. The muezzins of the other mosques repeated the extraordinary declaration. A dead silence followed.

"At my side," the iman went on, "a light appeared; and the Prophet of the Prophets caught me by the hair and put me on my feet. 'What art thou doing, Ibrahim Muhamed?' he said. 'What are the Faithful doing? Have all in Moghrib, except my son Abd-er-Rhaman, forgotten that words are women, and that acts alone have value in the eyes of the Eternal? All know that Muley-Hassan is the despised offspring of a dancing girl and a palace servant; that not a drop of Sheriff blood flows in his veins. All know that he renounced the religion of the Unique God to kneel before the altar of the Christian idols whose impure cult imposes intemperate excesses of forbidden wine and unclean pork meat. Why, therefore, is he still Emir-el-Mumenin? Is it that my Faithful are afraid of cowardly Franzawis?'"

From somewhere, in the direction of Marakesh-el-Djedid, paf! went the sharp report of a rifle. Colonel Jalard thundered, calling the sharp-shooter a "*Nom de Dieu de cochon!*" and promising him six months on the straw of a military jail. Reeling backwards, the iman, hit the low parapet and took a perpendicular plunge into the mosque's court-yard. Muley-Hassan, who saw his head-long fall from the Kasbah, laughed a good deal and felt exceedingly grateful. But the shot came either too early or too late. The muezzin in the nearest minaret, yelled:

"The Rumi dogs have killed the iman! Go ye, Men of the Book! Ye have the superiority of numbers and the time has come for the truth to become known. Even if they will shoot me, I will say that the Unbelievers have ere this been called to account. Know ye, Children of

Omar, that again two regiments of the Uncircumcised have been speared and mutilated by Abd-er-Rhaman's followers."

Another report. The speaker took the same short road to the ground the iman had taken before him. Another muezzin shouted:

"Allah help us! The Franzawis are killing the men of God! Why do you wait, O my brothers? Let him who has sins to expiate, remember the promise of the Book: 'Those who die for the Faith I shall deliver from the solitude of the grave and I shall grasp them by the hair to lead them to Allah's feet. The Paradise of the Most High is their inheritance. They will hear the songs of birds and the light laugh of fountains. Wondrous fruits will be brought them by the houris. And, on the soft green grass where the playful breeze makes waves, velvet eyes and coral lips will fill to overflow their thirsty hearts.' Go now! The Rumis do not number two thousand. This is Gazi! The Holy War. Go! Unfurl the green banner. There is no God but our God, and Muhamed is the Prophet of God. Allah Akbar!"

Below the orator, a woman, who could be seen from the whole of the Mechouar, let her haik fall and climbed on the parapet of the terrace.

"You hear what he says," she cried. "Go! Will you wait until women take the lead and snatch your flissas from your fingers? Go, cowards! *Fissa! Fissa!*"

They were going! The whole male population of Marakesh-el-Bali was surging forward towards the Kasbah. The vaulted passages and unclean streets were too narrow to give free scope to their cohorts, and there were men

who, stumbling on the disjointed flag-stones of the stairways, disappeared, swallowed, crushed and ground, leaving blood on the soles of a thousand naked feet. All these fanatics had weapons, even the old men, even those who had not yet reached the age of adolescence. Many did not even know where they were going. They had merely seen the green banner and the crowd. It was enough for them to know that the flag of Islam, the Sacred Standard of insurrection, had been unfurled to be sure that the Prophet was again leading Ishmaël. Fanaticised by the word of Gazi, they offered to their God their last prayer, and implored the favor of perishing in the slaughter, sure, after such a death, to find near them, in the sepulchral darkness, the angel Azraël and the promise of the seventh heaven. They had Berber knives, Algerine flissas and *khandjars*. Most of them were Berbers or Arabs accustomed to the use of weapons; but some were Moors unskilled in warfare who knew that they would find the courage necessary to the satiating of their hatreds as soon as the first drops of tepid blood, gushing from a stretched throat, would glue their trembling fingers.

It soon became apparent that the Senussiya were in perfect command, and that some plan of operation was steadfastly adhered to. It seemed to Colonel Jalard that this plan involved a vigorous attack on the undefended Kasbah and the subsequent plundering of the ghetto. Then, and only then, would the turn of Marakesh-el-Djedid come. Had the Colonel of the Fourth Zouaves been given his choice, he would have confined his activities to the protection of the European quarter; but the Resident General had issued orders to rescue Muley-Hassan, and he would

have to attempt the impossible task. Upwards of twenty thousand people, those that had no other weapons than knives and khandjars, were moving towards the Kasbah. The French troops were in a position to make short work of this rabble, and they succeeded in carving their way as far as the Mechouar; but once they got there the dance began. The Mechouar had become a trap. As soon as Colonel Jalard, left temporary master of the deserted piazza, ventured to enter the narrow streets that led to the Kasbah, puffs of smoke from every roof, from every door and from every mucharabieh, came to make him realize that this was to be a *lab-el-baroda* indeed, a game of powder compared to which the savage stormings of Constantine and Kalaa would look like child's play. The French had come in answer to a riot call, and had no artillery. In these conditions the combat was bound to degenerate into a duel between sharp-shooters. It mattered little, at such a short distance, if the rifles of the insurgents were somewhat inferior in range to those of the military. A Berber always manages to get hold of a good enough gun, and when he finds himself protected by the parapet of a terrace, he can shoot fairly well. The streets of old Marakesh were so narrow that they were practically impassable. Each house would have to be stormed in turn, after a hand-to-hand fight. The commander of the Frenchmen saw that the Berbers, counting only those who had rifles, outnumbered him fifteen to one. He retreated to the centre of the Mechouar and began to sweep steadily with his fire the approaches of the street he intended to take to reach the Kasbah.

His aim was to force the foe to keep under cover a few

minutes. He would then avail himself of the respite to rush a storming party to the first houses. These captured, he would meet the insurgents on their own level and at a decided advantage; as he would then be able to mow down all who would leave the roofs for the court-yards or the streets. But this plan, consecrated by three-quarters of a century's success in North African warfare, failed on this occasion. While his attention was engaged on the Kasbah's side, the Berbers opened fire in his rear.

"*Cessez le feu! Formez le carré!*" he shouted. "*Attention pour les feux de salve! En Joue! Feu!*"

His horse sank under him as the bugler was clarioning his last command. His fire was now sweeping the four sides of the piazza. But he saw with dismay that his own men were dropping like leaves.

"By God!" he grumbled. "If this goes on much longer, they will clean us out."

At this moment his attention was caught by Spahis in red coats who came charging at full speed down the street leading to the European quarter. They were charging with drawn blades, making way for a staff officer. Two of them, shot from the housetops, fell from their saddles just as a party of Berbers, issuing from an alley, were blocking the path. A hand-to-hand scuffle followed. Colonel Jalard saw the sabres flash and reappear, red to the hilt. The officer emptied his revolver in the face of his assailants. They broke, but only two Spahis remained. Before they had crossed the Mechouar, one of them fell and lay on his face. Jalard had already recognized General de Diolie's *officier d'ordonnance*. A second later, d'Ornano checked his horse, which snorted, his nose almost on the

bayonets. Looking straight at his superior, the Corsican saluted.

"Colonel," he said, "you are to retreat instantly and take dispositions to defend the approaches of Bab-el-Kasaf, in Marakesh-el-Djedid. Order of the General."

"Are we attacked on the side of Bab-el-Moumen?" came the query.

"Yes."

"Good thing you came. I was wondering whether we were going to protect a drunken pig and let the colonists fight for themselves."

He ordered the bugler to sound the "*Garde à vous*." This was done. D'Ornano gave him his horse.

"*Par files de quatre*," he commanded. "*Pas gymnastique en avant. . . Marche!*"

At his side the bugler fell. D'Ornano picked up the bugle.

"Can you blow?" asked the Colonel. "All right! Give us the charge."

The Corsican brought the bugle to his lips and started the tune:

Y'a d'la goutte à boire, là haut . . .

Y'a d'la goutte à boire.

Y'a d'la goutte à boire, là haut. . . .

"Faster, d'Ornano," said the Colonel, "or we won't be able to get there at all. That's better. On, ye children, for the glory of the Fourth Zouaves. Remember the laurels of Laghouat and Zaatcha! Faster, d'Ornano! Faster! . . . Ah, *sacrebleu!* . . . Where is Ansenin? Tell him to assume command. . . . Tell him . . ."

He coughed and spat blood. D'Ornano succeeded in keeping him on his horse. On the housetops, the foe kept up his relentless fire. A little further up, they found a mob of tall, half-naked Berbers packing the passage. The Lieutenant-Colonel ordered to clean the street with steel.

A hideous advance began. After a scrimmage of five minutes the column began to move, gaining by inches, pushing its way through raw flesh, hitting with the butt when the bayonet missed the mark. At d'Ornano's side, a zouave saved his life by pushing his thumb in a man's face and extracting the eye after the small finger of his left hand had been bitten off. The Captain himself was compelled to raise a horseman by the boot and throw him on the other side of his horse to escape being punctured by a flissa. The survivors were now walking on corpses. When they reached Marakesh-el-Djedid, they were no more than seven hundred.

As soon as he saw the way clear, d'Ornano took the horse of the only spahi who remained and galloped to Bab-el-Moumen, where he had left his chief. A handful of spahis and a battalion of Foreign Legion defended the town on that side. Some Turcos manned three machine-guns on the ramparts. A single battery of 75 *mm.* spat fire and blood on the native town. D'Ornano bit his lips. He dismounted, entered a house and climbed the stairs four at a time.

On the roof he found General de Diolie, bleeding, on the shoulder of a captain. A dozen officers and sergeants looked on in grave concern.

"Here is d'Ornano!" exclaimed Lieutenant de Vaudreuil.

He helped lay the General down, his back against the wall. D'Ornano came nearer and saluted.

"I report that the Fourth Zouaves is holding the gate of Bab-el-Kasaf," he said. Then he added with more feeling, "Nothing serious, I hope, General? Did anybody send for a surgeon? How do you feel?"

"Bad." And the wounded man grinned sadly. "Don't send for a surgeon. It's no use. . . . How many men did Jalard bring back with him?"

"Seven hundred at the most. Lieutenant-Colonel Ansenin is in command."

"Was Jalard shot down?"

"Yes. Shot through the chest as we were leaving the Mechouar."

"Is he alive?"

The Captain remained silent. The General understood.

"D'Ornano," he asked suddenly, "how long can we hold out? Your opinion frankly."

"About three-quarters of an hour."

"What would you do in my place?"

The Corsican shrugged his shoulders with irritation.

"What could I do? Without the men, we are powerless to do anything."

"You think they will murder the colonists and sell the women as slaves?"

"Evidently. Only Abd-er-Rhaman could prevent a promiscuous slaughter; and he is in the Atlas."

"What then?"

"Nothing. We are to die here; it's very simple. My advice is that you carve 'Remember Marakesh' with a

bayonet on the walls, as an English soldier did of old on the curbstone of Cawnpore's sinister well. More the pity that we cannot forward to the General Staff all the miscellaneous information we have got,—the strength in men and rifles of each tribe, the records of the secret agents we can trust, and, above all, the topographical surveys made by our spies in the mountainous districts. This would simplify reconquest; and, by God, our successors would know whom to hang for this day's work."

There was a silence. Hit by a spent bullet, a sergeant staggered and fell. D'Ornano averted his glance as soon as he saw him resume his feet. His frown deepened as he looked in the direction of the ramparts. General de Diolie was sinking rapidly.

"D'Ornano," he said at length, "I have keys in my left pocket. Take them out, will you?"

The Captain obeyed.

"Unpin my cross. I hate to think that it will fall in the clutches of these rascals. You know where the papers are. Where others would fail in the mission, I believe that you are the man to succeed. Do what you can to reach Oujda, or Figuig. If you fail, you won't die more stupidly in the *bled* than you would here. Go now, and remember Marakesh."

The Corsican knelt to take the hand of his chief.

"Is there anything else that I should attempt?" he asked. "Mademoiselle de Diolie?"

"Gisèle?" said the moribund. "God bless you, boy! She went riding an hour ago on the Mogador road. Shoot her dead rather than let her fall into the clutches of these scoundrels."

These were his last words, and a moment later the end came. As soon as he was convinced that his chief was dead the Corsican hurried down the stairs. His way lay across the Place d'Armes. As he reached the other side of the square, he met a native house-servant fleeing for his life from a dozen Spaniards.

The piazza was fast filling with hysterical mothers carrying weeping children. D'Ornano knew only too well that a general escape was a forlorn hope. Perhaps a few men, like himself with nothing to lose, might manage to reach the walls and attempt flight by way of the gardens. But all who were hampered by women and children would remain corralled on the piazza until the coming of the Moslems.

It was Khadour who came to open General de Diolie's door. The Corsican was too preoccupied to notice the embarrassment the native betrayed. Brushing past without a word of explanation, he ran up-stairs to the General's private office and began rummaging through the desk for the papers. These secured, he hurried down, meeting Khadour on the way.

"Horses *fissa, fissa, jehanum ke marfik*," he ordered. "Also fig-cakes and water. Where is the Saïda?"

"Gone riding, *ya Sidi*."

"Where?"

"On the road of Dar-el-Beïda."

D'Ornano took him by the throat. "Where?" he repeated.

"On the road of Mogador, *ya Sidi*. Forgive thy servant. I failed to remember."

"*Barca*," interrupted the Corsican. "Never mind the

horses just now. Is this the room of Sidi Leïtoun? In with thee."

Inside he found the painter, pale and worn after a confinement of two weeks, busy with a belt of cartridges and an automatic Colt. He had been gazing through the trefoil-shaped opening that looked on the European town.

"What in thunder is the row over there?" he cried as he caught sight of his friend.

Indicating by a gesture that his explanation was only postponed, the Corsican went to the aperture. Near the ramparts, at the other extremity of the city, houses were already burning. The mob had almost reached the Place d'Armes, and colonists were already shooting. Marakesh's European inhabitants had now deserted the housetops. While some were seeking concealment in the cellars, the greater number, driven by the smoke, had descended into the street to die in the open. D'Ornano caught sight of a party of Berbers on the terraces of the houses that overlooked the other side of the piazza.

As the hillmen began shooting, the crowd oscillated like an ocean wave beating against the rocks. Until now the air had been filled with deafening screams. This was followed by an impressive silence as the colonists, corralled like helpless cattle, now realized that the end had come. Women were seen on their knees begging sweethearts to forego shooting long enough for a last kiss. Here a mother offered as a mark to the bullets her little girl. There a husband was trying to make up his mind, determined and yet loath to shoot the dear one who had slept on his shoulder.

D'Ornano turned to Leyton. "General de Diolie is

dead," he explained. "He has ordered me to save our important papers. I am going to try to leave by the Mogador road. We will meet only women and children in the native city and we may get through. Are you coming?"

Leyton hesitated. To save himself when the women and children huddled in the square were facing death or slavery did not seem altogether right to a man of his training. Still, Gisèle was riding on the Mogador road and she had the first claim. He nodded.

An exclamation from d'Ornano startled him. Khadour had vanished. While the Captain was looking through the aperture, the native had managed, by movements so cautious that they had escaped Leyton's notice, to get near the door. D'Ornano hurried after him.

When he reached the court-yard he found the back gate open. He knew he must forestall the faithless servant's next move. Calling to Leyton to join him, he entered the stables.

"Thank God, the horses are saddled," the painter heard him cry. "Hurry. The swine has shown his hand too far ahead of time. He should not have looked at Mlle. de Diolie as he did last night at supper."

He stopped his companion as he was in the act of mounting, looked the saddle over, and tightened the girth with his teeth. They started at a mad gallop in the direction of the ramparts.

D'Ornano knew of a way of escape through the negro freedmen's village, the *Beni-Ramassés*—sons of the picked up—as they are called in Sabir. Here mud huts had been erected against the walls. The Corsican dismounted in a blind alley and kicked at a door. An old man came out.

"We want to leave the city," said the Corsican. "Let us through or else he who has a right to know shall learn by what hole smuggled weapons enter Marakesh. We are Sidi-Malik's friends."

The old negro looked at him furtively, found what he wanted—namely, the scar d'Ornano bore on his forehead, and threw the door wide open. Sidi-Malik's associates knew all about Abd-er-Rhaman's kidnappers.

The Corsican led his horse by the bridle inside the hovel. Leyton followed. Swallowed up in ill-smelling darkness, they went through the secret passage that led under the city wall. Another door opened. They were on the threshold of another mud hut in the huerta. The gray ramparts were now behind them.

In a flash they were again in the saddle. Following the banks of a *seguia*, they made for the main road that led to Mogador.

They rode on for an hour. The Corsican now found a chance to acquaint Leyton with what had occurred since twelve o'clock. The recital was so crisp, it reflected so clearly the soldierly qualities of the narrator, that the American marvelled that a man who reddened or paled at a word of railing or criticism should in troublous hours evince all the qualities of tempered steel.

It did not escape him, however, that d'Ornano grew reticent as soon as he came to relate the scene that had taken place between the General and himself. Still, reticence was so customary with him when speaking of Gisèle that the American had begun to wonder whether this was not due to the fact that the young woman had so often made him a target for the shafts of her sarcasm. Presently

he heard him express his annoyance that they should not yet have come across her.

"You have seen what grounds I had for distrusting Khadour," he added. "The fellow is sure to pursue us and you can trust him to bring friends along. If we should be unlucky enough to miss your cousin, she will run straight into the arms of these rascals."

They were now going uphill. Leyton, who turned to look, warned his companion that the whole of Marakesh seemed to be in flames.

The Corsican reined in his horse. In the stillness he heard the noise of horse's hoofs. The next moment Gisèle, riding at breakneck speed, came into sight.

Shouting to her to stop, the Corsican uttered a cry of warning. Startled by the expected meeting in this spot, the girl pulled the bridle so sharply that the horse, taken unawares, missed his footing and stumbled.

Gisèle was unhurt, but the horse was done for. Before Ali, who followed in her tracks, could come to her assistance, she was on her feet. When Leyton told her that Marakesh was in the hands of the Moslems, she turned to the Corsican.

"And you are here, Captain d'Ornano? You have left my father?"

With this, she ordered Ali to bring her his own horse, and before the Corsican was given a chance to explain, she had snatched the bridle from the hands of the chaouch. Leyton thought it was time to interfere. But d'Ornano, pointing down the road, interrupted him.

"Look! Get back to your horse! Mlle. de Diolie must understand that she can be of no help to her father."

A *sof* of pursuers had appeared. The Corsican turned to Gisèle, never doubting that the newcomers had been led hither by Khadour.

"Ali will give you his horse. He will easily find his way back to Marakesh," he said. "But you must come with us."

"I sha'n't," she snapped. "My place is over there, and so is yours. You should not have left him."

D'Ornano became livid. He called Ali.

"Take the Saïda and put her on horseback," he ordered. "Quick!"

In the native town pandemonium was loose and the looting of the Jewish mellah had already begun. At the end of his interview with Mustapha, which had reached its fitting climax when, to the accompaniment of Djeïlma's peals of laughter, he had kicked the now almost naked grand-eunuch into the street, Sidi-Malik had bought a bas-sour and had sent the Circassian, under the guard of two small boys, to the place where Anoun-Dialo was waiting. Then he had joined the crowd that rushed to the attack of the mellah.

In so doing he was not impelled by any particular desire to take a direct part in the disturbance; but the idea that he would not see the Jews reap what he considered their just deserts was simply more than he could stand. True to his Berber origin, he despised the Moors and the negroes; hated, with the same uncompromising eclectism, Arabs, Christian dogs and even all Berbers who were not of his own tribe; but for the Jews he cherished a refined hatred. Towards them he felt rabid pure and simple. Not that he had ever felt the weight of the money-lender's oppression—

he stole and never borrowed—but he could not admit that a man could be a man and be so meek as to allow himself to be struck on the mouth without drawing a knife. He had also old scores to settle. On two or three occasions the cunning of a Jew had drawn him into a bad bargain, and he had a wonderful memory for wrongs. The wrongs he had suffered! He had long since forgotten the hold-up of a Jew in Ouezzan, and the burglary perpetrated in the house of another, in Arzila.

He had come without arms, so as not to be tempted to take a conspicuous part in the slaughter; but he soon found an occupation. It did not take him long to discover that the men who fought in front, and who had had the first chance at looting property, were blockheads who had been content with merely preying upon household utensils, furniture, clothing and minor valuables. He reasoned that Jews were not the people who would leave gems and precious metals unconcealed, especially when the rumor of an uprising had reached them an hour ago. Accordingly, he undertook a systematic search of the dwellings. His theory did not seem at first to be borne out by the facts; for he visited a dozen houses, stumbling on corpses at every step, without gathering more than an insignificant plunder. But at last his obstinacy was rewarded. He discovered in a cellar a large cask of olives. The fruit had apparently been there a long time, for it was decayed. This in itself aroused his suspicions. Other casks had stood around this one; their marks were left on the damp earth. They might have been placed there as a bait, he thought. If so, they had answered their purpose; the decayed fruit was all that remained. He

upturned the cask, and saw with amazement that it was half filled with gold coin.

All told there might be there six thousand pounds sterling. It was a heavy load. He looked around for something in which he could deposit and conceal his haul, for, above all, he wished to leave the house without attracting attention. It seemed to him that the belt worn by a near-by corpse was precisely what he needed. He was in the act of untying it, when he noticed that a man, a mulatto, had just entered the cellar.

He was on his feet in a twinkling. He asked the newcomer what he wanted. The mulatto, pointing to the gold and showing his white teeth in a broad smile, answered cynically:

"Half of that."

"*Macash!*" roared Sidi-Malik in pure Sabir. "Not a douro, not a mitkal! *Maboul enta, beni-kelb!* Wait, thou, son of a she-donkey! Thou wilt instead get half of this, if I can break it on thy back!"

He brandished his dreaded Berber cudgel, the matrack. The scuffle which followed did not last long. The mulatto dodged his first and second blow, but the third caught him on the ribs and brought him to his knees panting.

"*Barca!*"—that will do, commented Sidi-Malik generously. "But make a move and thou wilt get a broken head, thou black camel from Sokoto! How did I strike, eh? Pretty good? Thou wilt get nothing but blows at this game, Sudan. I advise thee to learn first how to use thy khandjars."

The mulatto did not thank him for the lecture. He had two ribs broken. Probably Sidi-Malik, skilled in such

things, had felt the snap, hence his willingness to spare the fallen man. He went back to the gold, made up his bundle and left the house without further mishap.

He felt that after this he was altogether too rich to be in the streets; too rich even to remain another day in Marakesh. He knew that a period of unrest was sure to follow the upheaval. Periods of unrest are disagreeable to the capitalist, and he already counted himself a rich man. Now, that to his previous savings and to the two thousand odd pounds he had extracted from the belt of the howling Mustapha was added this new haul, he might perhaps be worth fifty thousand dollars, without reckoning the market value of four camels and a woman. But the mob, after having wrecked the Kasbah and plundered the ghetto, had ere this begun to set fire to the European part of the town, and it was only too evident that all hopes for a quick restoration of order had gone. The best that could be hoped was that the native authorities would soon recover the upper hand. If they did, their first move would be to claim, in Abd-er-Rhaman's name, the share of one-fifth of all plunder due to the Prophet and his descendants. And Sidi-Malik was not only unwilling to part with some of his holdings in favor of a Sultan whose temporal authority a tribesman born in the Bled-es-Sibla is always disposed to contest; but all his life he had been in fear of questioning. Accordingly, he took at a brisk pace the road leading to the kuba of Bou-Said Muttalib. Anoun-Dialo and Djeïlma were ready for departure. He issued orders for an immediate start.

It was only four o'clock; but the insurgents were by this time absolute masters of the city. The Fourth Zouaves

had fallen to the last man in the attempt to hold the gates of Marakesh-el-Djedid against the tide, and now fires flared up every minute, marking the progress of the insurrection in the European quarter. The caravan proceeded for two hours without meeting a soul. Then, in the quiet that enshrouds the earth at the hour of sunset, Sidi-Malik thought he heard shots.

He ordered a halt. Providing against contingencies, he inspected the magazine of his rifle. A day like this everything was possible; and he remembered that caravans, in times that were not so distant, had been raided by *sofs*—plundering parties of rebels—at the very doors of Marakesh. He commanded Anoun-Dialo to take his Tuarregg lance. They waited. In the dry atmosphere of this quiet hour, shots could be heard for two miles. Five minutes passed. They heard shots again, this time nearer. The camel-driver was now able to distinguish, between two reports of a Martini, the yelping of a revolver. He understood at once that some Christians were making an attempt to escape and that a *sof* was in pursuit. As there might be something to gain without much trouble, he resolved to wait for developments. The place was good for a hold-up. From the spot where they had halted, Marakesh, drowned in a sea of green palms that were fast becoming purple, was no longer visible. They were in the *bled*, in the open country. Among the driss, palmettos, aloes and Barbary cacti, wild flowers bloomed profusely. The Atlas range, which appeared so near an hour ago, had removed beyond a screen of misty light; and its blue chain, sharply delineated against the sky, was so uniform in tone that it gave the impression of an abrupt wall bordering the horizon



“Aroua mena ! Sidi d’Ornano ! Sidi Leïtoun ! Akh Arbi ” . . .



on the south. The splendid light fell like a microscopical powder of pink, gold and lavender blended in astonishing shades, making a contrast equally sharp with the blue of the mountain range and the dull tones, red ochre, jaune de Naples, burnt Sienna and neutral pearl gray of the broken ground in front.

Suddenly Sidi-Malik saw a mounted woman, a European in riding-dress, spring into sight. She was followed by two horsemen. Behind them, four Arabs were in hot pursuit. The camel-driver saw one of these shoulder his rifle and fire, but evidently without result, for both the Nazarenes brought their revolvers to the eye and sent their answer.

They were now facing Sidi-Malik. The camel-driver felt like laughing when he saw one of the Arabs roll like a rabbit and bite the dust after a terrible fall. But his mirth died on his lips. A lump—tenderness, or admiration, or both—grew in his throat; and it was with a voice so hoarse as to be scarcely intelligible that he yelled to Anoun-Dialo:

"Aroua mena! Sidi d'Ornano! Sidi Leïtoun, akh arbī!"

Then d'Ornano, Gisèle and Leyton witnessed an extraordinary scene. Sidi-Malik did not even attempt to shoot. He sent his mehari sailing like a bird into the midst of the three remaining pursuers and took his sword. The first man he met he cleft from the brow to the collar, his mehari at the same time colliding with the horse with such force that the four of them were brought to the ground in a cloud of dust. Anoun-Dialo, coming behind, managed to insert five inches of spear in the back of Khadour. The remaining raider took to flight, to be

stopped almost instantly by d'Ornano's bullet. In two minutes—it could scarcely have been more; Gisèle had had scarcely time to slacken her breakneck speed, wheel her horse around and join Leyton—it was over and the two rescuers were greeting their friends. Although he had sprained his left knee and limped badly, Sidi-Malik was all smiles. He was richer by four horses, four saddles and their trappings.

Gisèle had become hysterical. Sidi-Malik hastily helped her into Djeïlma's bassour. Although the camel-driver felt that they were safe from further pursuit as soon as Anoun-Dialo reported that he had made certain with his flissa that none of the four raiders would return to tell the tale, he thought it best to push on. Two hours later they pitched camp under the stars, sheltered by a cactus hedge from the keen breeze that came from the snow-clad Atlas.

CHAPTER VII

IN THE WILDS OF THE ADRAR

"Who does not cross the *Adrar N'draren*—Great Atlas—foregoes the chance to meet deviltry face to face," runs the Arab proverb. Its purport is to warn the traveller against the dangers he will run at the hands of the fierce tribes of the Bled-es-Sibla. But Sidi-Malik, himself a Berber, knew that a flight across the wilds was safer than an attempt to reach the sea. As Captain d'Ornano shared this view, the caravan began at daybreak its slow march towards the mountains of the south.

The painter, the Corsican and the camel-driver had spent part of the night discussing the best course to pursue. Leyton had, at first, been in favor of a march towards Mogador or Mazagan, where Mlle. de Diolie, the Captain and himself might perchance board an English vessel. Sidi-Malik and d'Ornano had trodden heavily upon this hope. In their opinion, the road which all fugitives from Marakesh were bound to choose, would prove the most dangerous. While it was certain that raiding sofs would block the way to the sea and diligently search all caravans, plundering even those that concealed no Nazarenes in disguise, the Berbers of the mountains would, on account of their isolation, be the last to get news of the disaster.

As Sidi-Malik carried the *anaïa* and the *mezrag*—the

truce and badge of friendship which the faithless mountaineer always respects—he not only would cross the Atlas in safety, but he was sure of a welcome. The *anaïa* conferred upon his person all the privileges of an adopted son, and the *mezrag*—literally lance—was an assurance that influential residents would, if need be, make his quarrels their own. His friends would be as safe as himself. In the great hiding-place that lay on the other side of the Anti-Atlas, travel would be easier if not equally safe. Sidi-Malik knew every *ksar* of the “Country of Fear,” every *bordj* and every watering-place. A rapid dash across the vast expanse might lead the party to Algeria before Abd-er-Rhaman was himself ready to cross the border.

Leyton agreed to the plan with a sigh. It was not that he disliked the idea of the adventure, but the health of his cousin gave him some concern. A reaction had followed the mental strain of the previous day, and the young woman was in a state of complete collapse. After Sidi-Malik’s timely interference, she had sobbed for hours, gradually sinking into a state of prostration more alarming still than the hysterical spell that had preceded it. She was not ailing in the strict sense of the term; but the shock of her father’s death, and the general catastrophe seemed to have drained her vitality. In her present condition of apathy she was so inactive and indifferent that she appeared to be laboring under the influence of some powerful narcotic. The painter wondered what he was to do with a sick woman, threatened, perhaps, with some dreaded brain trouble, when no doctor and no medicines were available, when it was not even possible to stop.

Travelling on camel's back, on the cushions of a bassour, is at best uncomfortable, even for native women used to the hot and stuffy confinement of the tent. No breath of fresh air penetrates through the thick curtains of the clumsy palanquin. The space is inadequate for all who cannot bear to sit for hours in native fashion, cross-legged and with no change of posture. To this must be joined the rancid smell of heated wool and the nauseating scent of musk exhaled by the camel. Lice and fleas are sure to make every nook and corner of the bassour the theatre of their frolics; and the exasperating rolling motion of the camel comes to add to this already long list the culminating horror of sea-sickness. Perfumes can, of course, be used. They are freely resorted to by the natives. But, with the scents that are available—French and American chemical concoctions dubbed rose-water, amber, benjoin and jessamine by a nomadic race that has long since lost the memory of fragrant *Arabia Felix*—it is by no means certain that the preventive is not worse than the evil.

Leyton had good reasons for sighing, then, when thinking that if Mogador had not been an unattainable goal, Gisèle would have, on their way to Southampton, Cardiff or Liverpool, enjoyed the benefit of sea-breezes loaded with invigorating marine fragrance. Instead of that they would cross the desert. April was not yet the season for hardships. But it would take six weeks to cover the eleven hundred miles intervening between Marakesh and Colomb-Bechar, and in less than six weeks the Sahara would become a furnace. Still d'Ornano represented to him that the ordeal would be of short duration. The summer heats would have just begun at the time they

would cross the Algerine border. If they could only cover forty miles a day and had to make a stop twice a week, they would not only reach civilization without having to tax unduly the endurance of the women, but they would even be able to afford a halt in the high valleys of the kingdom of Sus.

They set out on their journey two hours before sunrise. These two hours of night travel, ordinarily the most enjoyable of the twenty-four, were little relished by Leyton, who, half asleep in his saddle, rode alongside Sidi-Malik. He was weary in mind and body. Gisèle had kept him at her side until midnight, and he had spent the three hours that preceded their departure in the conference with d'Ornano and the camel-driver. After the prolonged confinement of his convalescence he felt the unusual exertion severely. The freshness of the morning, however, acted on him somewhat as a bath, and when the sun rose he had regained enough of his spirits to make mental note of the rapid changes in tonality on the objects that met his sight.

With its five camels and seven horses, their caravan looked quite imposing. Mounted on one of the two mehara he had stolen in Sidi-Malik's company, the night of Abd-er-Rhaman's kidnapping, Anoun-Dialo, too heavy to ride a horse, came first, showing the way to the pack-camels. Gisèle and Djeïlma were in the bassour, on the second mehari. On horseback, Sidi-Malik and d'Ornano were leading by the bridle the steeds captured the previous evening.

The painter alone did not share in the division of caravan labor. Not only did it devolve upon him to attend to his cousin's wants, but he was still incapacitated by his recent

wound in the shoulder. Moreover, the horses, wholly unused to their new masters and unaccustomed to leading, were no end of trouble. In the present state of affairs they were useless and a nuisance. The impossibility of taking into the desert animals which needed water twice a day had decided Sidi-Malik to exchange them for camels. This he would probably be able to manage in Amsmiz or El-Goundafi, before entering the unsurveyed and practically unexplored country of Sus.

Five hours after the start, they reached the first foothills and the winding gorge of the Wad-Nafis. Up to this time they had been riding through a flat country, green with the new grass born of the spring rains and literally carpeted with wild flowers. Anemones, crocuses, pimpernels, musk balsam, cyclamens, gladiolas, larkspur, mignonette, hyacinths, irises and asphodels, an infinite variety of lilies, and some very small orchids in form exactly resembling wasps and bees, grew side by side in patches succeeding to areas covered with palmettos, thapsias and cacti. Aloes were to be met on every hand; but trees were scarce. An occasional argan and carob tree, sometimes large enough to shelter from the sun-rays a whole caravan, arose at long intervals. Only once they saw an olive grove and twice a fig orchard. There was not a trace of cultivation. The space intervening between Marakesh's palm groves and the mountains, where agricultural Berber tribes cultivate rough farms, bore no evidence that man had ever tilled the ground. There was hardly a sign of his presence. An occasional *kuba*, the tomb of some saint or madman, opened its door wide to the traveller who had enough ready cash to contribute his share to the support of the holy

man's descendants, but not a house was to be seen. It was a wilderness of flowers alive with game. Partridges, quails, jerboas, hares, rabbits, civet cats and foxes were fleeing in every direction. Above a swamp whose still waters were concealed by a jungle of reeds, they saw swarms of starlings. Herons, outardes, egrets, crested larks and francolins were also numerous. Hawks, ospreys, griffon vultures and kites were keeping an eye on this under-world, describing lazy circles above the waters before falling, stone-like, on the prey of their election. Leyton went forth after game at a mad gallop. He had many things to forget, and he found physical exertion a good remedy for painful thoughts. He succeeded so well in driving away morbid fancies that the caravan halted without his becoming aware of it, and the camel-driver had to run in pursuit to tell him that it was past ten o'clock.

It had been agreed that they would travel from four to ten A. M. and from two P. M. to sunset; the mid-day pause being so arranged that they could avail themselves of the shade met along running streams. The first stop was made on the banks of the swift and shallow Wad-Nafiz, under tall poplars that closely resembled cottonwoods. Leyton judged that there should be good fishing there. Unfortunately, he had neither net nor rod. Fishing by hand was, of course, out of the question; the pools were so deep that he would have to take a complete bath. As cherry-laurels, so poisonous that natives will avoid even sleeping in their shade, had their roots in the water, he desisted with a sigh of regret from the dangerous undertaking.

He went back to camp. His companions were having

their troubles with the camels which obstinately refused to kneel. To his surprise he found Gisèle, not only awake, but feeling so much better that, at Djeïlma's solicitation, she had exchanged her European garments for the native garb. Some change of this sort had become imperative. They were now in the Jibali country, at the extreme border of the Bled-el-Maghzen or Territory of Government, and the independant Berbers who dwelt beyond, men of the mountainous Bled-es-Sibla, were so distrustful of travellers that their valleys were known to the Arabs as the "Country of the Gun."

A little before two o'clock they resumed their march. The landscape was fast changing. The track lay among the shingle of the river-bed, now on one side, now on the other; and they had to cross at every turn. Seemingly they were heading straight for the Djebel Tagharat—"The Lord of the Peaks"—that loomed in front, bright with sunlit snow, to an elevation of fifteen thousand feet. But before sunset, they turned their backs to the mountain and for a while went due west.

In the bassour, Gisèle and Djeïlma were making each other's acquaintance. The Circassian had presented her companion with sweets and a pair of babooshes. She was now exhibiting her jewels and her garments. Her outspoken curiosity somewhat disconcerted the French girl, little used to the direct frankness of natives. The school Djeïlma had attended in Tripoli was evidently not meant to inculcate principles of housekeeping to an English prude. Taught to rule by the display of whims, childishness and tigerish anger, she was certainly an enchantress, and when listening to her chatter, Gisèle was more than once reminded of

Circe and of the metamorphoses she worked on hapless navigators.

Night overtook them on the hillside, as they were reaching the agricultural belt of fig, walnut, almond and olive groves. Square adobe houses had appeared, and a Jibali—hillman—was seen from time to time astride his donkey, surly and silent, his many knives always in evidence, and as hard-faced as the porphyries, flints and diorites of his native valley. But the traces of cultivation were becoming more numerous. Wherever the valley widened, the waters of the stream were diverted to irrigate cultivated terraces, a few feet wide, where beans, tomatoes and turnips were grown in profusion.

Shortly before sunset, Leyton witnessed a sight that made a deep impression on his mind. It was not so much that the color in it appealed to the painter in him, but it held all the dark soul of old Moghrib. Typical of a race without nerves, a race unconsciously cruel because not provided with the complicated machinery which, with the Caucasian, transmits sensation to the brain, a Jibali was riding. The donkey was furry and small, so small that the man's feet touched the ground. The grade was steep, yet the rider kept on, pricking the poor beast with his knife, all the while playing with his beads and following the flight of his far-away dream, his eternal dream of plunder and conquest towards distant horizons. Behind, a woman came on foot, worn out, with a child on her back. Another child, a little girl, lagged at the end of her mother's haik and looked sleepy from exhaustion. The scene was typical of a patriarchal age. This man astride on his burro was not the provider—the wife did all the work and was treated a

little worse than the donkey or the goat. He was, and that forcefully, the protector who did the fighting when need arose. As such he felt entitled to all the comforts.

The precipitous ravine on the brink of which the path climbed, the brooms, lentiscs, arbutus and thuya trees twisted by the raging wind that blew through the whole length of the gorge, the kumas sheltered among fig trees that turned blue in the radiance of dusk were things of the Adrar not to be met anywhere else. The gigantic umbrella pines opened, between the columns of their copper-colored shafts, the brown of the earth and the bright green of the tree tops, wonderful vistas on the village studded vales that led sparkling streams to the plain of Marakesh. As the path became steeper and more difficult, the palmettos became also scarcer, the walnut forest taking their place. The keen breeze was now loaded with the fragrance of resin, thyme and sage. A vaster expanse of plain stretched itself to the north. At sunset they saw the Tensift reflect, on twenty miles of circuitous stream, the gold of the western sky.

They entered El-Goundafi late the next day, having left Amsmiz on their right. The report had reached Sidi-Malik that a caravan coming from Mader-Sultan was on its way to Marakesh, and he wanted to reach El-Goundafi in time to barter his horses for camels. This second day of travelling proved much more difficult than the first. The gorge of the Wad-Nafiz was narrowing, and the path, in some places less than two feet wide, looked down into dizzy ravines. It had become impossible to lead the horses by the rope as formerly. However, the intelligent animals had not only ceased their prancing, but they followed of

their own free will, testing their footing with greater sagacity than human beings themselves. The camels were a source of greater worry. The sharp flint stones were a constant danger to their large, flat and comparatively tender soles, and they evinced little capacity and less desire for self-preservation. In the bassour, Gisèle and Djeïlma were passing through all the stages of anguish and despair, travelling "liver in the mouth," as Sidi-Malik expressed it. The slopes above them were utterly barren. It was only beyond El-Goundafi that they were to meet with the forests of Aleppo pines, cedars and sweet-scented firs.

In El-Goundafi they spent the whole of the next day. This place of no importance loomed large in the eyes of the painter, who knew that almost unknown territory lay beyond. The village possessed a *fondouk* for caravans, a market-place and a grim citadel. The rest was a mere agglomeration of mud houses with projecting roofs of branches. Notwithstanding that the other caravan had reached the halt before them, they were lucky enough to secure three cells in the *fondouk*. Sidi-Malik found easily what he wanted. He offered his horses for three camels of good Filali breed, concluding the deal after five hours of fierce bargaining.

Early in the evening the court-yard of the old mountain *bordj* became the theatre of a strange performance. Aissaoua, who had undertaken the yearly pilgrimage known as the "stampede," reached El-Goundafi on their way to Meknes, where they were to visit the tomb of their prophet Aïssa. Banners flying, they entered the *fondouk* just as Leyton and d'Ornano were finishing their meal.

The two men went down into the court-yard. Smoking

torches and fires of camel dung threw blotches of red light upon the brown bodies of the hasheesh-drunk fakirs. They were all but naked, a white sash around the loins constituting their only garb. As everything in the first plane was a contrast between high lights and dark shadows, their emaciated anatomies showed with painful distinctness—the shaven skulls, the hollow orbits filled with the wild look of the dreamer awaking from a nightmare, the jutting-out ribs and convulsed abdomens forcefully reminding the painter of the saints and martyrs of the Spanish school. Their attitudes were those of frenzied people in the throes of hysteria. They were dancing, devil-like, with distorted gestures, open mouths and upturned eyes in the midst of a circle of cheering spectators.

The dance ended, they gave a disgusting exhibition. Some of them stepped on live coals and remained motionless while their frizzling flesh tainted the ambient with an abominable stench. Others ran long needles through their jaws, puncturing themselves from cheek to cheek. Others were furnishing the proof that long handling had conferred upon them total immunity against scorpion stings and snake bites. But the spectacle became altogether unbearable when a ram was brought them by the orders of Khaid El-Goundafi, the feudal lord of this valley. In a twinkling, nothing remained of the offering. They had torn the animal to pieces while still alive, and swallowed it, wool, flesh and viscera. All that was left were the hoofs, horns and bones, which they threw in the pool of blood that lay on the ground.

Caught in the whirl of religious passion, the white figures in the audience were firing into the crowd, unmind-

ful of the children, as bare and graceful as little fauns, who were lying flat on the pavement at the feet of the performers. Kneeling camels occupied one corner of the picture. The mud wall back of the court had crumbled into heaps of indescribable material, so that a vista was opened into the distance beyond. Outside, far from the red glare of the torches, it was night, the fearful night of the highlands, an unfathomable perspective of rocks lying awake, intent, listening to all the whispers of silence, under a sky of enormous depth sprinkled with twinkling stars.

The next day they made an early start. They were bound for the Djebel-Wishdan pass, and the steep ascent would, in Sidi-Malik's estimation, prove the most trying part of their journey. Rocks upon rocks were piled above. They soon left the walnut region to enter the belt of prickly oak, cork oak, lentisc, caper bush and arbutus, finally leaving behind the juniper, the *araar* and the broom, to face the snow-streaked peaks, gleaming with sparkling sunlight and running water, the steep slopes of shining diorite where nothing grew but tufts of *driss* and *halfa*, and the torrent beds enlivened with occasional thickets of dwarf cedars. After two narrow escapes from a fall into the bewildering abyss below, they reached the pass at nine o'clock. The headwaters of the Tensift were now behind them. In front, towards the west and south, lay the kingdom of Sus. They were in the very heart of the Adrar.

Although the descent was so steep and dangerous that nobody was able to see that conditions had improved, Sidi-Malik, who was now at home, declared that on this side of the Wishdan the country was much better. They

had left a gorge to enter a canyon. The noon hour was the hour of effects and the late afternoon did little for this chasm. Shortly before sunset its aspect became phantasmal. Dull blues and neutral gray tones, so vaporous that a fog seemed to issue from the roaring waters, filled it from bottom to rim. This rift in the earth's crust spoke of the age of the planet and of the slow formation of the mountains. They left it just as the last gleams of sunlight were dying along the slopes and entered a gorge that was broader, a sort of encased valley planted with very tall cedars. The forms of the trees were the wildest and most wonderful Leyton had yet seen; grim, ghastly limbs, such as Gustave Doré drew to illustrate Dante's "Inferno," frantically threatening a pale sky.

It was nearly dark. Before the four men had time to unload the camels, to fetch water, to gather wood and erect the tents, complete obscurity overtook them. The stillness was overwhelming. While Leyton and d'Ornano were building a camp-fire, Sidi-Malik and his servant were driving stakes close to the flame and tying solidly the animals. They had not yet completed their task when they were startled by the roar of a panther or a leopard.

D'Ornano took the first watch, Anoun-Dialo the second. The painter was awakened some time before one o'clock by the Sudanese who put a rifle in his hands and gave him cartridges. A big moon, nearly full, was hanging as a lamp behind the branches of a sanobar. Lighted to its bottom, the ravine had increased in weirdness. It was chaotic. Enormous trees grew between the porphyry boulders; a thick growth of reeds guarded the approaches of the stream. Lighting a cigarette to shake off his

feeling of chilliness and banish sleep, Leyton kept gazing at the moonlit face of the cliff on the opposite side of the torrent, his thoughts turning to the description given by Flaubert of the last hours of the Mercenaries, in Salamambo; the Gauls slowly dying of hunger and thirst under the arrows sped from the slopes by Numidians and Balearians. But even this did not give an adequate conception of the scene. The visionary Edgar Allan Poe alone had seen this pile of rocks.

"Mine eyes fell upon a huge gray rock which stood by the shore of the river and was lighted by the light of the moon. And the rock was gray, and ghastly and tall—and the rock was gray. Upon its front were characters engraved in the stone; and I walked through the morass of water-lilies, until I came close unto the shore—and the characters were "DESOLATION."

He suddenly became aware that something had moved not far from the tent. From the trees came a screeching and gibbering which he could not refer to any animal he knew. He noticed also that the fire was flickering and that the frightened camels, with mad eyes and dilated nostrils, were pulling on their stakes. In front of him, among the branches of the nearest tree, two feet away from the moon, he saw lighted carbuncles. Reaching for his rifle, he took a quick shot. The thing to which the eyes belonged came down with a thump and a roar, beating the bush with its four paws. The strange screeching subsided as soon as death had done its work. It was followed by the disconcerting mirth of the hyena and the enraged yelping of disappointed jackals.

The cause of so much alarm and disorder proved to be

a panther. Anoun-Dialo went after the carcass. Leyton took a look at it and spoke to Sidi-Malik of the screeching he had heard. The camel-driver merely laughed and told him that there were monkeys in this valley; the same species of tailless apes found also in the gorges of Chiffa and in the neighborhood of Djebel-Musa, near Gibraltar, being frequently encountered in the highlands of Sus.

They saw them at sunrise, gambolling and combing their whiskers in the high branches of the sanobars. They were terribly human in grouping and attitudes. They appeared still more so when they went to the water in a body, and the patriarchs of the tribe were seen to pull the hair of the youngsters who scampered in the underbrush to pick and eat forbidden fruit.

That morning, for the first time, Leyton tried his hand at loading the camels. This he found a disagreeable operation. The *djemel* is not only the most discontented of all beasts, but he is an inveterate biter, proving so dangerous in this respect that a spear has often to be used by his *sokhar*. Ten pounds more than his load and the surly brute refuses to rise, bleating for mercy until the extra weight has been removed. He has other shortcomings. After he has bitten and grunted for a lifetime, he usually overdrinks and dies in the dust when the life of all depends upon him.

At nine o'clock they had reached a stretch of country that forcibly reminded Gisèle and d'Ornano of the Djurdjura Mountains, beyond Algiers. They had long since left the land of the Jibala to enter that of the Shellaha or mountaineers. Rugged, chaotic and steep in the extreme, the mountains they were now crossing were often barren,

sometimes covered with sweet-scented sanobars of great height, with thuyas, gum-cistus and gum-sandaragh trees. They were uniformly sun-baked and chronically devastated by locusts. The range on the whole affords but scant living, and the Berber would often suffer if he did not possess his gun and his spirit. But whenever the crop has been too bad or the locusts too numerous, he turns locust himself and strips his neighbor not only of his belongings but often of his bread, coming back to his native wilds with spoils enough to last him until the next spring.

As the highlander respects nobody but his guest, travelling in the Adrar is at best a hazardous affair. Jewish peddlers buy the right to cross in peace the territory of the different tribes. Other wayfarers secure the *mezrag* or covenant, the protection and friendship of some powerful chief of family. Sidi-Malik knew how to avoid pitfalls and conciliate jealousies between rival sheikhs. The proof that he carried the *mezrag* was demanded from him several times. In each instance he not only managed to satisfy the inquirer, but even, by making trifling presents, to secure his personal good-will.

They often met with villages and with strange castles of stone. The architecture of these pirates' eyries was Phœnician in its origin. In the shadow of these grim *agadirs* Jewish artisans were held in bondage, branded with the hot iron that also served to mark the cattle of their masters. All around Berbers were living in a state of lawless independence, in perfect contempt of the Sultan and of the French. Notwithstanding the interdiction of the Koran, their children turned out very pretty models of baked clay representing Arab horsemen. Racial hatreds

are long-lived in these mountains. They used these images as targets and pelted them with stones or shot at them with cries of execration.

If the castles were true Phenician constructions, the houses of the people were very simple affairs. The single room which the family shared with domestic animals had no windows and only one door. Issuing from a fire burning in the centre of the habitation, an abundance of acrid smoke rendered this hovel almost uninhabitable. Large amphoras plastered to the wall contained the family stores of beans and oil. Barley bread and dried figs were stored on a shelf in a corner.

Although most of the natives bore the marks of small-pox, they met with pretty little girls with dazzling teeth and black eyes. Leyton, however, found them somewhat thick-lipped, and there was no question that they were spoiled by tattooing. On account of the evil eye superstition, face-washing was almost unknown. The mothers were convinced that a bright complexion would attract the glance, and flies, as a consequence, were seen hovering in clouds all around these youngsters.

Young women took greater care of their persons. Even those who were not pretty were graceful. As, with a swinging of the hips that was almost a dance, they slowly climbed the steep streets, they frequently personified Biblical figures. Although their garments were often ragged, they all wore jewels of coral and silver. Seldom seen, except at the time of day it was customary to go for water, they then proceeded in a body, without a veil, carrying on the shoulder brightly colored jars which they closed with olive twigs, so as to avoid the chopping of the water.

Gisèle had begun to tire of the heat of the palanquin, of the sickening motion of the camel and of Djeïlma's company. Feeling better, she asked to leave the bassour. Leyton took with her the head of the caravan. Conversation was at first difficult. Obviously the young woman had constantly before her eyes the picture of General de Diolie dying on the walls of Marakesh. Still she refrained from voicing her thoughts. She remarked on the uncommon loveliness of the woman she mistook for the camel-driver's wife. Djeïlma's behavior towards her was somewhat unusual, even rude, she thought. The Circasian not only declined to respond to all attempts at friendly intercourse, but took all the room to herself. Once she had even declared that she would ask Sidi-Malik to buy another bassour for the Christian woman. As, at first, she had seemed well disposed, Gisèle could not understand the reason for such a sudden change of front. She was sure that, on her side, she had behaved with true Arabic decorum and had been especially enthusiastic in praising the beauty and jewels of her companion. There had been no quarrel, and it was hardly possible that Djeïlma should have taken offence at the non-committal answers she had, on two or three occasions, been compelled to oppose to her brazen questioning.

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CHAPTER VIII

THE LIONS OF TILIMSA

That day and the following were uneventful. Sidi-Malik killed a golden eagle and d'Ornano an *audad*—the indigenous wild ram. Leaving Amsug, they had begun to ascend again, and were on the point of entering the territory of the Aït-Jellal. The whole of that day they travelled through forests of cedars. The advance was difficult and the country so sparsely settled that the only people they met were two donkey-riders who overtook them as they were pitching camp for the night.

These men stopped, asking, as usual, to see the mezrag. They hailed from the immediate vicinity of Illigh. Sidi-Malik, who knew the sheikh of that village, bade the newcomers welcome, presenting each of them with a pouch of powder. After the meal, he proudly exhibited the fleece of the audad, the hide of the panther and the feathers of the golden eagle. The mountaineers, themselves bad shots, like all the people of these parts, admired soberly but with genuine feeling. The audad, especially, a powerful animal so bold and sure-footed that the Berbers, astounded by the dives he makes from dizzy heights, believe that the elasticity of his enormous horns alone prevents him from breaking his neck, is so difficult to stalk that his capture confers a lasting reputation on the fortunate hunter. The

visitors left the camp when the moon rose, and soon disappeared among the cedars that covered the slopes of the Djebel Asrar.

News travels fast in the Adrar. At ten o'clock next morning, as they had covered about half of the distance intervening between Amsug and Illigh, they saw with astonishment and no little dismay that the pass below them was blocked by horsemen. D'Ornano's first thought was that they were about to be attacked. He spoke of his fears to Sidi-Malik, but the camel-driver shook his head with a deprecating gesture. They continued to advance. They had barely gone a few yards, however, when they were met by a volley of shots fired in the air with ball cartridges. Then the whole troop made a dash towards them at full speed, yelling, throwing skyward their *moukalas* and catching them again before they had reached the ground. D'Ornano was too familiar with native ways to regard with undue alarm what he already had recognized for a lab-el-baroda, but the reason for the friendly display being entirely unknown, he awaited developments with some curiosity.

When the horsemen had stopped and order had to some extent been restored, a man, who probably spoke in the name of the whole tribe, addressed Sidi-Malik in *tamazigh*. He changed it to Arabic, however, as soon as he was assured that the others did not understand. He and his friends had come to invite the strangers to a lion-hunt. It had come to the ears of the tribe that they were good marksmen and that their guns were long enough to hit the audad himself. His name was Khail-ben-Tarek. This young man here was Bou-Djemel-el-Aziz—the father of

the precious camel—his own eighteen-year old son. The lions of Tilimsa were destroying all the cattle in the neighborhood; eighteen sheep, two horses and one donkey had been devoured in the course of the last month. Would not Sidi-Malik and his friends consent to help the Aït-Jellal rid their territory of the big-headed *kebirs*?

Sidi-Malik embodied his acceptance in a long and flowery speech full of self-gratification. He had speared hippopotami, he had killed elephants and done many other things. His brothers-in-law (d'Ornano and Leyton were his brothers-in-law, and Leyton, by the way, was a mute) were also mighty hunters, who would be glad to see the lions of Tilimsa. He explained afterwards to his companions that not only the carrier of the *mezrag* could not shirk a duty of this kind, but that, in making a request for help, the tribe did them honor.

Under escort of a whole *goum*, they proceeded to the next village. A lamb roasted whole and steaming *couscous* of semolina, raisins and stewed chicken was served them as they dismounted. The meal over, Sidi-Malik put Anoun-Dialo formally in charge of the caravan. The women were invited to strike acquaintance with the female folks of Khail-ben-Tarek, and the three hunters followed their new friends.

They were gone forty-eight hours. Left to herself, Gisèle sought to beguile isolation by beginning a relation of the events that had thus far marked their voyage. Leyton had strongly urged her to undertake the writing of a diary. Aware of the existence of a literary streak in his cousin—he often called it a kink and affected to believe that it was the Latin inheritance, the French yeast in her

nature—the painter had hoped that the task would help her regain the mental equilibrium the late events had destroyed. After the meal, he had gone to borrow d'Ornano's fountain pen, and had suggested that she seek in the *bassour* the quiet and seclusion she needed to put her thoughts in order.

The fountain pen had considerably puzzled Djeilma, who, for the first time in three days, had joined her companion for a bit of gossip. The cordiality had not, however, outlived Gisèle's refusal to part with "the pen that wrote without ink." The Circassian was now at the well, unveiled, surrounded by young fellows in fine clothes, in deep conversation with Khail-ben-Tarek's younger son. It had not taken Gisèle until now to discover that her companion was as inveterate a flirt as she was handsome, childish and spiteful. She could not help smiling at the thought of the castigation that would take place should Sidi-Malik come back unheralded and find his captive in this gay company of heart-breakers.

For the last three days she had been acquainted with the motives that had prompted Djeilma's sudden change of behavior. In Amsug, Sidi-Malik had bought a second palanquin. Since then she had noticed that whenever Leyton was riding back of the caravan, the Circassian, with veil removed, opened wide the curtains of her *bassour*. The painter had not yet understood. It could never occur to a man of his habits and training that, without a word having been spoken or a gesture exchanged, a Moslem woman, bridging the gulfs of race, faith and language, would fall in love with his good looks. But Gisèle had greater knowledge of the natives. She was aware that Sidi-Malik and Djeilma had begun to quarrel as soon as

the Circassian had discovered that the camel-driver had no present intention of going to Tripoli. She also knew how frequently it comes true that "the woman who sees the guest has no further use for a husband." Fully conscious that Leyton's affections were engaged elsewhere, she awaited developments with some curiosity.

She had also begun to puzzle over d'Ornano's behavior. Seldom leaving the company of Anoun-Dialo and Sidi-Malik, the Corsican seemed to make it a point to hold aloof. It was indeed possible that, with true Corsican vindictiveness, he was unable to forgive her the resistance she had opposed when it had become necessary to lead her away from Marakesh. Leyton had told her that he seldom spoke, and that only when he had an order to give or a question to answer. Spoiled by Leyton's responsiveness, she resented this uncompromising attitude to the point of setting it down to lack of breeding.

Still, when she was alone with the sad memories of a recent past, she brought greater fairness to the study of the inconsistencies she detected in a man who had been such a favorite with her father. She had long been aware that d'Ornano was uneasy in the presence of the sex he affected to despise. He was conscious, no doubt, that constitutional weaknesses and ancestral failings left him open to ridicule. Contempt being the only weapon he could decently handle against women, his answer to their taunts was that of simple acts, simple to the point of being disconcerting.

She had begun to wonder whether the man was not really timid. Timidity and brutality are so blended in some natures that it may almost be said that the second is the natural outcome of the first. Men who prefer to

storm a woman's heart *à la hussarde*, will, nine times out of ten, be found to possess strong qualities of action and very little small-talk. It was a question whether d'Ornano, who could not tolerate that the wit of others should be directed against himself, would not have proven much easier to manage if, in the beginning, he had not been caught between a superior who affected to make light of his ideas and a girl who took pleasure in deriding his achievements as a soldier.

The service he had rendered Leyton and herself deserved perhaps more than she had offered. In the hours of her deepest sorrow, she inwardly promised herself to make up with the Corsican, if only for the sake of the friendship that had linked him to her dead father. Until now, she had been restrained by the ever-present feeling that d'Ornano despised her for being only a woman.

Perhaps another consideration restrained her from taking the first step. She obscurely felt that the Corsican mistook for a love-affair the harmless flirtation she had, for a month previous to her father's death, carried on with the painter. For a man who possessed his sense of ownership, a conviction of this kind could lead only to total non-interference. She knew that if she wanted him to act like a human being and not like a bear, she must begin by making it clear that Leyton had no right whatever to claim her undivided attention. This, however, was more difficult to accomplish than to plan. When the painter was sick from the wound received in the Kutubia's undertaking, she had enjoyed as much as he had done the *entente cordiale* established between them. She was aware that the nurse's fingers deftly

find their way to a man's heart. It was a little late, perhaps, to send a herald to proclaim that the lists of the tourney were still open to all comers.

The hunters came back. From a sporting point of view, the battue had been a total failure. Lions were not game, but merely foe to these folk. Khail-ben-Tarek had taken no chances and the animals had been smoked out of their lairs. To prevent their escape, two troops of men, one upstream, the other downstream, had been lined across the whole width of the ravine. On the brink of the gorge, a dozen men were constantly engaged feeding the furnace. The felines had begun to roar as everybody else began to cough.

If Sidi-Malik had not chosen to indulge his immoderate love of parading at the moment when the lioness, springing through the flames, landed at the foot of the wood-pile, the hunt would have been a very tame affair. A shot from Leyton had stopped the animal. The Berber, who always hunted on horseback, no sooner saw the feline in the dust than he started at a gallop with the intention of transfixing it with his spear. He had hardly accomplished his purpose when the lion, jumping in his turn, took his bearings and made for the nearest foe. D'Ornano's bullet met the brute as he had sprung eight feet in the air.

It was lucky that the animal had been killed outright. As it was, the fearful impact bore to the ground horse and horseman. Dazed by the fearful fall, crushed under his horse and the now motionless lion, Sidi-Malik remained unconscious a full minute, unable to realize what had happened until the Corsican, catching hold of him under the armpits, drew him clear of the carcass and raised him

to his feet. Then, absolutely unnerved, he began to weep. The yells of the spectators filled the ravine. Leaving every tree, every crevice, the hunters were now running in his direction. When he saw that some of them, intoxicated by the scene they had just witnessed, were fiercely stabbing the game, kicking and cursing as Berbers are wont to do when the foe has met his fate, he recovered his activity. Pushing his way through the crowd, he reached the carcasses and cut them open with his flissa.

"The kebir's heart, Sidi d'Ornano!" he said. "The lioness' is my own."

The lioness was Leyton's; but no matter. To the artist's immeasurable wonder, he accomplished the revolting act that Moghrabis never omit in such cases. This heart that was still warm, he ate raw in the hope that the strength and courage of the big-headed kebirs would forever remain his own. D'Ornano threw the disgusting trophy away. An old man caught sight of it, fell down in his hurry to pick it up, succeeded against keen competition and, regardless of the gravel that polluted the bloody remains, ravenously devoured it.

The upshot of this adventure was that the caravan was detained another day by festivities. The Berber has few good points; but ungratefulness and lack of hospitable feeling are not among his weaknesses. There was nothing in the possession of these poor people which they were not anxious to force upon the visitors. When, at last, they were allowed to leave, an escort was given them. Three miles before they reached Illigh, they were met by another troop of horsemen; and two miles further an admiring crowd of women and children greeted them with shrieks and an

attempt at music. The sheikh himself came forward to extend to them the hospitality of his Kasbah. Sidi-Malik accepted, glad of an opportunity to make the round of his relatives and friends.

They left Illigh the tenth day after their flight. Grown beyond recognition, the fame of their deeds had spread abroad. They found another escort where they left the first, and a third troop met them further along, less numerous than the former, but equally eager to hear the tale of Tilimsa's tragedy. Sidi-Malik was constantly requested to relate the adventure, and d'Ornano experienced no little trouble in trying to avoid similar speech-making. For all his knowledge of Arabic, he feared that slips of the tongue would brand him a Nazarene; story-telling in Moghrib going so seldom without quotations from the Koran that, to pass unsuspected, the orthodoxy of his faith would, he knew, have to go through the hardest of trials.

They had some good sport the next two days. Boars were plentiful, and some of the men of their escort were experts in pig-sticking. Sidi-Malik always referred to the wild boar as the military pig, to distinguish it from the domestic or civilian pig he had seen in Algeria. The boar having almost disappeared from the sister country, and not to be met with except in uncolonized territory ruled by the military authorities, the distinction was a natural one. To Moslems, as well as to Jews, pork meat is unclean. As, before the advent of the French colonists, there had been no hogs in Algeria, language had no word for them.

But these Berbers of Southern Morocco ate the boar. Taken in its spirit, the Koranic prohibition extends to

each and every part of the beast; but the sentence is so worded that there is room for quibbling. The inhabitants of the Atlas throw away the bones and pray for forgiveness. They hunt the animal on horseback, with lances. Leyton found the sport not only exciting, but attended with no little danger. He killed that day one boar and two porcupines. These were also reckoned as pigs; Sidi-Malik very aptly describing them as pigs dressed in pen-holders.

They were nearing the desert. Vegetation had disappeared and breaths of warm air warned them of the proximity of the sands. Water had already become scarce and the camels proved more surly than usual. The ground was difficult and the descent so steep at times that the loads, gradually displaced, often caused the pack-animals to balk. Four or five times a day a reloading became imperative. This was usually accomplished by the men of the escort. But it went with such a noise and bustle, such a pandemonium of contradicting orders, that Leyton and d'Ornano often wished that Berbers were not born with such a propensity to assume unwarranted authority over their fellow-men. A halt always looked so much like a brawl of the murderous kind that Gisèle was in deadly fear of a shooting affray. It really came as a relief to the whole party when, on the morning of the twelfth day, they took leave of their body-guard and saw the path before them free from newcomers. This last stage of their journey across the range was also to be the shortest. At ten o'clock a wonderful vista of palm trees unfolded itself before their eyes, and two hours later they reached the banks of the Draa River.



CHAPTER IX

THE OASIS

All a-flutter from expectancy, Gisèle was riding with curtains open. The path had until now been winding its way alongside the dry bed of a torrent, in a gorge so narrow that the eyes, long used to the view of heated boulders and craggy foothills, were unprepared for the sight of the palm forest that now appeared across a league or so of sandy waste. This last stage of the journey had taken the travellers across a wilderness so utterly desolate that human beings had disappeared, glad to relinquish the useless stretch of country to scorpions, horned vipers, chameleons and lizards. The heat was intense. The sight of green palms, with its attendant promise of shade, was so welcome after these trying six hours of travel, that Sidi-Malik and Anoun-Dialo burst into song.

The gorge had widened into a broad opening which permitted the view of distant barren hills—the last spurs of the Anti-Atlas which still lay between the caravan and the Southern Hamadan. The rolling ground of the intervening bottom-lands was covered by a palm forest one hundred and fifty miles long by twenty wide, unequalled the world over in its dimensions. The abrupt wall of the wine-colored Adrar N'Draren, now behind the travellers, explained the fertility of this valley, where irrigating ditches

gathered and distributed every drop of water sun and earth had not been able to drink higher up on the slopes. As they were getting nearer the palms, the faint fragrance of blossoms was also becoming stronger. The hush of noon had fallen. The flocks of pigeons had sought the shade. They were still following the banks of a tributary of the Draa. Pools of clear water were frequently met ever since the slope had become more gentle, and boulders had disappeared to make room for gravel and pebbles. But, despite the improved conditions, vegetation had vanished altogether.

The withdrawal of nature's gifts was now complete, and the process had been so gradual that not even Gisèle had experienced anything like a shock. However, the desert was now ready to give back all that the traveller had lost, and this with startling suddenness. Where nothing had been but barren rocks, cobalt sky and exquisitely colored sands, a wall of palm trees heaved into sight. Behind this wall was a jungle. To the coloring of the desert was added water and shade, the opaque African shade as cool as water itself, and the bright green of vegetation. Men reappeared, and with them important towns, rising from the ground with true barbaric splendor. Having stolen the traveller's belongings so deftly that he was still unaware of his losses, the Maker of Mirages, bent upon astonishing his guest, made restitution in a fit of generosity as unaccountable as his sudden impulses of deceptive treachery and violent anger. He gave back in the way of an Oriental despot who, having taken a liking to a prisoner, not only restores to him all he has lost, but adds gifts of his own, gifts that are worthy of a king.

On the edge of the oasis they crossed a graveyard. This necropolis built under the palms had peculiar charms, not the least of them being the lack of that sense of all-pervading gloom usually felt in burial-places. Like most North African cemeteries, it spoke of quiet, comfort and smiling repose. It was a flower-carpeted park, strewn with white stones which had been grouped without preconceived order. No sanded avenues here. The narrow paths made by naked feet went their own free, circuitous way through the tall grass. Large areas were nearly desert. In other places the number of tombstones was great enough to create the impression that quarried stone awaited here the coming of the masons. Elsewhere cyclamens made room for anemones; crocuses, irises and asphodels contributed to the many hues of this fanciful Oriental quilt. Their fragrance had attracted so many bees that, in the sunny places, it seemed as if lighted arrows were dancing in a shower of powdered gold. Pepper trees with red berries, willows and sycamores, grew under the palms. All the tombstones were alike and of a design equally simple; marabouts who had died in odor of sanctity being alone granted the kuba: four adobe walls and a cupola which relatives and friends whitewashed twice a year.

In the gardens, sunburned Drawis were hoeing. Circling around noria wells, blindfolded mules brought to the surface the water which gave life to this paradise. White walls crowned with blossoming vines threw but little shade on the dusty road. As the caravan crossed a small bridge made of palm trunks thrown over an irrigation ditch, frogs jumped in the water and musk turtles followed. A little

further along, Gisèle closed the curtains to avoid the dust the animals of a donkey-driver were raising. She opened them again to watch a native woman, who came wabbling on the road, veiled from head to foot. But for the delicate ankles encircled with silver *m'saïs*, the pink heels which, at each step, were leaving the red babooshes and the soft gazelle eyes enlarged with *kolh*, she might have passed for a bundle of linen. A blind beggar and a boy came in the opposite direction. The young woman thought the appearance of the two so biblical that she greeted them in Arabic, raising her forefinger to her lips.

"Greeting on thee and greeting on thy father, Jacob, son of Isaac."

The boy answered with a bright smile:

"*Ya Saina, salaam aleikoum.*"

The caravan halted. Scarcely had Sidi-Malik dismounted when native children of both sexes, some of them almost naked, children who ranged in tone of skin from the pure ebony of the thick-lipped Haratin to the pale complexion of the Saharan Moor, came running in the dust with outstretched hands, beginning a concerto of "Salaam, salaam; Sidi give me something." Some brought fruit, others square crabs caught under the stones of the river-bed; others still—little girls—brought clear water in brightly colored earthen jars gracefully balanced on the top of their heads. The parents of all these children were at work in the near-by gardens; and they came as much for curiosity's sake as to satisfy their passion for insistent begging. They snapped back at Sidi-Malik, who threatened to drown the whole batch of what he termed the vermin if they did not leave more room for the camels.

Some were pure negro or mulatto children with prominent abdomens and high cheek-bones; others were Drawis, tainted with negro blood, but with ethnological characteristics so obviously their own that they could with good reason disclaim affiliation to the darker race; others were of pure Semitic ancestry, not a few of these possessing an exquisitely delicate Jewish cast of features. One of them, a little girl of about five, whose only garb consisted of silver bracelets, heavy ankle-rings of the same metal, a coral necklace and gold ear-rings, attracted Gisèle's and Leyton's attention by her shy gentleness. She had brought Barbary figs in a basket and patiently waited for a taker. This amounted almost to begging, the fruit being so common as to be valueless; but greed, the shameless and ever-present greed of the North African, appeared only in her eyes and she refrained from voicing her request. When Gisèle took the fruit, giving her a coin in exchange, she did not even smile. Flushed with pleasure, she grabbed the piece of money, and, with a flame of savage triumph in her black eyes, ran away as fast as her little feet could carry her. The painter and his companion laughed when they saw her fall after a few steps, rise again in a cloud of dust and resume her flight as if she was convinced that it was unsafe to have thus fleeced the strangers. They saw her disappear behind the corner of a low wall.

Sometimes helped, more often hampered by this crowd of unwashed, shrieking ragamuffins eager to make themselves useful, Sidi-Malik and Anoun-Dialo unloaded the camels and led them to the drinking-place. Leyton, Gisèle and d'Ornano were already eating. As soon as the meal was over, the young woman got up.

"Who follows me to the river-bed?" she asked. "This is too lovely a spot to spend the hours sleeping."

She was looking directly at d'Ornano. The shadow of a smile came on her lips at the thought that she held him cornered where he was no longer in a position to hide the true timidity of his nature under the bluntness of a soldierly retort. To allay his embarrassment, she added immediately, repressing in the measure of her power the dancing light of amusement which shone in her eyes:

"Does Captain d'Ornano need a special invitation?"

He flushed deeply.

"Not at all," he answered, no longer embarrassed after a direct challenge. "But I warn you that I am poor company. What conversation can you expect of a Corsican bear?"

"No conversation whatever. George talks so much that he usually succeeds in mixing my ideas on all subjects. You will answer a crying need if you can make him mistake your silence for stern disapproval. Does he ever bother you about painting?"

"I can't say that he does."

"*O fortunatus nimium!* Only listen to him and he will prove to you that in the violent light which permeates this landscape, it is easier to obtain a true outline of an aloe by drawing the shadow than by studying the plant itself. And how do you suppose he explains the intensity of the coloring? Only this morning he vouchsafed the opinion that the Creator, having progressed this far south, running out of chiaroscuro and getting impatient because of the heat, decided to daub the landscape; painting the desert being on the whole such a hopeless job that it were better

to empty the box here and let the light do the trick. Hence these purple shadows, these mouse-grays deepening into lavender, this veronese green of the vegetation under the flawless blue of the cobalt sky. Is not the conception original?"

They sat down in the shade of a tamarisk. The banks of the torrent, so barren a mile above, were now overgrown with tall reeds, aloes of gigantic size and Barbary cacti. On flat stones, in the middle of the stream, native women were washing. Like all Saharans, they were without veil; their garb consisting solely of the tunic of blue *khunt*. Their headgear was somewhat more elaborate, and cumbrous jewelry was not lacking. They had all brought with them their youngest children. In the water to the neck, two and three year olds were splashing each other in perfect glee, while others, younger still, and none too carefully watched by their mothers, were crawling on the flat stones. This caused Gisèle some uneasiness. But her surprise knew no bounds when she observed that some of these infants actually could swim. She saw one who could not be more than four and a half years, take a fifteen months' baby on his back and swim across a pool. It was only a few feet in diameter, yet the water reached in it a depth of nearly five feet.

Not far off a man was washing his raiment. He acquitted himself of this duty in characteristic man-fashion. Soap was, of course, out of the question—he probably never had heard of that staple. Stark naked in the sun, his matrack behind his back, he was dancing upon his wet clothes to the accompaniment of a monotonous song.

Leyton went in search of a secluded spot from which

he could sketch this scene without being himself observed. The conversation between d'Ornano and the young woman was suddenly interrupted by a faint nasal music proceeding from the other bank. White spots were moving between gray walls. It was a tribe, or a portion of a tribe, on its way to summer pasture grounds. The newcomers came slowly, in solemn procession, halting a minute in front of a whitewashed kuba hidden under the green palms. Then they crowded the banks.

Gisèle felt that the coming of these nomads had struck the note which was lacking, animating the landscape with a touch of life which was altogether its own, something that would have looked out of place, perhaps ridiculous, in other lands, but which was here absolutely typical. The players of fife, derbukha and tom-tom moved aside, continuing to play their pentatonic *nouba* while the others proceeded to cross. The barbaric melody, in other lands suggestive of the wild calisthenics made popular by Cairo's dancing girls, had lost here its roof-garden flavor. It had become something pregnant with the fragrance of times infinitely remote, and so suggestive of untrammelled freedom that the young woman at once connected the scene with the pastoral life led by the tribes of the same blood who, centuries ago, harassed the frontiers of Assyria in bold defiance of the chariot-riders of Tiglath-Pileser.

The horsemen were the first to cross. The water was so shallow that it barely reached their stirrups. These men, evidently pure Arabs, were fully armed. As a protection against the heat, they all wore the burnous or *selham*. The *chechia* of white cotton and camel's hair protected the head. Their other garments had been

chosen to suit individual fancy, and the brightest colors were in use. But as the different pieces of clothing, far from having been selected at random, had been chosen with due regard to the relation they would bear to the color of the mount, loudness of dress was nowhere in evidence. Each had two burnouses: one white, the other blue, pearl gray, brown, scarlet, lavender or orange. They all had the same wide stirrups. Silver spurs as long and sharp as stilettoes, wrought-leather saddles, boots and trappings to match the costume, completed their equipment. Their weapons showed the same eclectic taste. Flint-lock moukalas were the rule; repeating-rifles of European make the exception. Although revolvers were unknown, they all possessed clumsy pistols of enormous caliber, some of them of the most curious workmanship. Old-style yatagans were in the possession of every man. Not a few had lances and spears of Targui make; some assagais. In their belts they carried all sorts of knives, from Algerine flissas to strange-looking weapons sold in the bazaars of Timbuctoo.

They gathered on the opposite bank, waiting for the rest of the caravan. Negroes on foot followed them. Some were slaves, others free Hartanat acting in the capacity of family servants. The camels, pack-animals and thoroughbred, came behind. The djemels were all heavily loaded, but the mehara had not been disgraced. They carried the bassours. There were not enough of them, however, and many women were left on the other bank. They proceeded to cross on foot.

The Koran prescribes that no woman shall show her face. Very well! With due respect for the commands

of Muhamed, these wives and daughters of nomads wrapped all their clothing around their necks and entered the water. Good breeding kept d'Ornano from laughing, but Gisèle, who had not the same reasons for repressing her mirth, laughed freely when she was thus made to understand that modesty is primarily a question of race and degrees of latitude.

It was five minutes before d'Ornano dared look at his companion. While the caravan filed past, he had had time to face the situation, and for once his customary bluntness was well inspired. Since this was the land of the Matter of Fact, crude situations which could not be ignored might be improved by brutal handling. There would have been absurdity in keeping a straight face when laughing was precisely what saved the young woman from embarrassment. He entered at once into the spirit of her humor.

"I am afraid this is the land of the shameless," he said, "and I trust you will not be too disagreeably surprised when Djeilma proceeds to cross a ford in this manner. In the Sahara you will often have to make allowances of this kind. Sidi-Malik, for instance, is apt to reproach to his camels the sins of their female ancestry in unlaudatory terms. Djeilma is quite as outspoken and perhaps more disquieting. It were better if you did not understand Arabic; but since you do all my apologies are useless. They would not make you deaf and blind. I hope you did not feel too uncomfortable, this morning, during Sidi-Malik's and Djeilma's quarrel. Threats and the language of diplomacy were equally powerless to make them shut up."

"So it appeared," she interrupted. "And I meant to ask you what it was all about."

"It is a little difficult to explain," he replied. "Djeilma is apt to flirt."

"I know she is."

"Oh, you do? Then all of us are not blind. . . . At any rate, Sidi-Malik is very wide awake. He cudgelled Djeilma soundly, and it will happen again. Let me tell you a story. While I was in Ouadaï, Sidi-Malik brought me one day a half-grown *girrit*, a baboon, you know, captured by him after a tremendous run through the thorny mimosas. He came to me all covered with blood. When I saw him give the monkey a spanking I thought anger had something to do with it. But no. He was as cool as I was, and he explained that it was all part of a system. He warned me to lash the beast every morning, if I wanted it to remain meek and gentle. Otherwise the *girrit* would bite, he explained. And it was true. I neglected the advice, and three days later I was bitten. Djeilma is exactly like that baboon. Spiteful wickedness would simply ooze through her skin, if her affable master did not have recourse to osteopathic treatment."

"Then, *a priori*, you indorse the system?" she inquired

"With all my heart. And why not? Do not believe that I am making a paradox. I do not in the least pretend that all women should receive a daily beating. I am speaking solely of Djeilma. In so far as she is concerned, Sidi-Malik's system meets with my unreserved approval. Here again I will not deny that the chivalrous feeling which leads a man to spare his mate is eminently respectable. But we must have a definition of chivalry. I understand chivalry to be the respect of strength for weakness. But what respect do we show the comparative weakness and

low cunning of a snake? When a badly behaved child pricks us with a pin, we spank him regardless of his physical inferiority, and by doing so we do not in the least transgress the canons of generosity. Why should we not treat in the same way a woman who combines irresponsibility and venomousness? Sidi-Malik is a man. Is this a reason why he should be victimized by a creature of whims? We civilized people forbear from lifting our hand in such cases. But can you blame Sidi-Malik for acting in accordance with his own lights in the matter?"

"It is hard to say. But surely you won't question that true wisdom would have consisted in choosing a better companion?"

"You are right. But this is a mere displacement of the question at issue. Djeilma, falling into less skilful hands, would have merely been free to work greater havoc. She represents a certain quantity of wickedness loose in the world. The man who, like Sidi-Malik, holds the reins with a strong hand is therefore a public benefactor. If he made a bad bargain it is his own affair. Champfort says that 'we must choose between loving women and knowing them.' Sidi-Malik, who loves Djeilma, is blind to her true character. Wisdom for him would consist in casting her adrift. But to blame Samson for having loved Delilah, Hercules Dejanire, Jason Medea and Antony Cleopatra would be to sin against human nature. We can regret, at the most, that they loved and trusted at all."

"Must we, though?" Gisèle interrupted with some heat. "All these heroes would have been brutes had they not loved as they did. After his crimes against the giants, the hydra and the Amazons, we cannot fancy a Hercules

who would have been also the murderer of Dejanire. Without his Delilah, the house-wrecker Samson is a mere brandisher of jaw-bones; and without his Medea, whom by the way, he abandoned with her children, Jason is only a contemptible thief of peltries peddling through the Euxine Sea the emblem of a Spanish order."

"So that to become truly great Sidi-Malik will have to wear next to his skin the burning tunic of Nessus?" he inquired with quiet irony.

"I do not mean that, not quite, at least."

"You simply hold to the view that it was love alone which transformed into heroes men who were only great criminals?"

"Precisely."

"And the Greek and Jewish allegories have no meaning? . . . Women have been accused of individualism; but they will go far to uphold the standard of their sex, I believe. Judith, Herodias, Cleopatra and Roxelane mean to them what Alexander, Hannibal, Cæsar and Napoleon do to us. The case is this: From time immemorial the struggle between men and women has been going on. There were men who were brutal. But I am sure that there were still more women who were as shiftless and deceptive as the ever-flowing waters. Come a strong man, and invariably the woman will be found who will send him to his doom. For the honor of the sex, this must be explained away. True enough, even women will admit that Herodias and Cleopatra would dishonor a modern music-hall. But, say they, the mole bores underground because irresistible enemies roam above. Treachery, lies and treason are the only weapons

which the greater strength and brutality of man leaves in the hands of women. Then comes the triumphant argument: "Is it the rabbit who begins the shooting?"

"What has man to answer to it?"

"That it was not Adam who stole the apple, and that king Solomon, who married three hundred wives, still spoke of womankind with bitterness. I realize that all women are not bad; but, then, it is the opportunity which makes the thief. It is a fact on record that a number of strong men, when not utterly ruined by women, have been led by them to dishonor their laurels. Who held Hannibal in Capua while Latium was rising up in arms? Who suggested to Cæsar the harebrained undertaking of Alexandria, thus putting in jeopardy the total work of his life? Was it not Lady Hamilton who caused Nelson to order the shameful bombardment of Naples? Granted that these men were more human for having loved, were they really greater? Human! What does that mean? A man can be human and still be a fool or a knave? Those who aim at being superhuman should strive to remain masters of themselves. And since love is apt to bring weakness they should shun it as a matter of principle."

"Really?" she said ironically. "As a result we shall have another star in the frigid sky of aimless endeavor. Another builder will look upon the works his hands have wrought to discover that all is vanity and vexation of spirit, and that there is no profit under the sun. Are there no good women in the world, Monsieur d'Ornano? Are they not the reward? What is this vain attempt at building upon sand? What impels the worker to labor? Surely not the empty desire of shifting particles from right to left under

the ironical eye of the Maker. Why does he act? Love of mankind, will you say? This love begins at the family's hearth. For one Dejanire there are perhaps two Aspasia's and three Beatrices. Woman has been too long neglected as a factor of civilization. Is it possible to be superhuman? Is it even desirable? A dispassionate study of the question would soon bring you to realize that humble women have impelled the work of great builders. Can it be said that, as a body, we are responsible for the taste the most objectionable members of our sex inspire in man?"

Leyton was coming back. She got up. At the beginning of their conversation she had meant to make a friend of d'Ornano. Now she was not sure that it was worth while. However, that most feminine of all womanly impulses, curiosity, impelled her to glance in his direction. He was smiling.

"Well done," he said. "May I add something?"

"You may."

"I am apt to think and to act according to theories. In the majority of cases theories do well enough. But there are exceptions to all rules."

"Well?"

"In grammar, exceptions have to be learned by heart. Don't you think it is incumbent upon the woman to make the proof of her worth?"

"Indeed, I don't," came the reply. "Let man find out—if he must."

CHAPTER X

AT THE FOOT OF THE KASBAH.

The whole of that afternoon they trod dusty paths in the midst of gardens. Their guide had planned to reach Mader-Sultan before nightfall. They came in sight of the *ksar* just as the sun disappeared behind the western spurs of the Adrar. At Leyton's request, Gisèle opened the curtains of the *bassour*.

They had reached the Daabieh of the Draa, in whose waters all the colors of sunset were dipping. Rising on the hillside, above the flooded bottom-lands, Mader-Sultan stood like a Mont St. Michel isolated by a rising tide. The aspect of a city crowned with a massive citadel, bathing in a lake surrounded by a forest of palms, was so striking, especially at this hour, that the young woman cried out in admiration. On account of an effect of mirage, the town seemed to float in the air high above the water-line. The crudeness of daylight, with its sharply defined planes, had changed to a golden haze in which all distances were lost. The palm forest, on the opposite shore, became blue, purple and lavender, ending, in the distance, in a mist whose pink hue was scarcely distinguishable from the sky. The stream wound its way through enormous depths of landscape towards the mountains of the Wad Nun, in the unfathomable west.

Mader-Sultan, an impossible city built by the djinns, reflected its whitewashed constructions in the waters. In

the magic of the light, enough details were lost to hide its leprosy and its squalor. On the ramparts built on the water-front, on her mosques and her Kasbah, she bore the priceless marks of age. It looked as if a city had always stood there; as if, for centuries past, horsemen on pink mares had crossed the stream, raising a shower of silvery sparks; as if women in blue khunt had always kneeled on flat stones to fill their jars, while children bathed in front of the cactus hedges; as if camels and laden donkeys had always been swallowed by the yawning shadow of the dark gate; as if beggars had always been found, sitting cross-legged, at the door of Sidi-Brahim's kuba, offering to the passer-by pinches of the earth that covered the corpse of the dead warrior.

If the illusion was destroyed once they found themselves inside the gates, climbing the narrow passage that led to the fondouk, the picturesque sight of a passing funeral came to help them forget the wretchedness of the surroundings. They were warned of the approach of the procession by the strident shrieks of female mourners. The street was narrow. To avoid blocking the path, Sidi-Malik saw no way other than pushing his camels against the walls. They waited. As the wailing came nearer, the street, deserted a moment before, filled with men who were leaving their unfinished pipes of kief to perform the duty prescribed by the Koran. A subdued but ceaseless chatter overhead warned them that, from the housetops, females were looking down on the caravan. When the funeral procession turned the corner the women broke into a concerto of discordant shrieks.

A running crowd was now flooding the street. Those who carried the corpse, convinced that they improved

with every step their chance of entering Paradise, attempted to keep ahead of the less fortunate who aspired to the same honor. The procession owed to this emulation a considerable impetus. Wrapped in a linen shroud, his big toes tied together, the departed sailed on a litter above a sea of brown, shaven skulls. His wives, his female relatives and the professional mourners, all wailing and scratching their faces with dyed nails, followed on foot as best they could, wabbling along with the baskets of offerings and the sweetmeats which dead persons are supposed to eat while awaiting in the grave the coming of Azraël.

It took five minutes for this procession to pass by. When the caravan reached the fondouk night had completely fallen. To Sidi-Malik's great disgust, the unloading had to be done by torches. The Berber was by no means an angel of patience; when ruffled he usually became as surly as his own beasts. Long contact with the camel seemed to have developed in him the habit of snake-like attacks. His quarrel with Djeïlma had considerably upset him, and this unloading by torchlight furnished him with a pretext. Having managed to singe the hair of one of the animals, which retaliated by biting, he picked a quarrel with Anoun-Dialo, instantly challenging him to a bout of rabah. The negro took him at his word and knocked him down; whereupon the camel-driver drew his knives, and was with difficulty restrained by d'Ornano from harming his most devoted admirer. Although he surrendered to the Corsican's entreaties, he gave vent to his feelings by creating a terrible scene, cursing everybody and finally leaving the fondouk with an oath that he would never come back.

Gisèle went to sleep with a heavy heart. Despite d'Ornano's assurances that these demonstrations were periodic with the camel-driver and that he would surely turn up inside of forty-eight hours, she still had misgivings as to their future relations with the offended man. Their vessel was now stranded on a forlorn shore. What course would d'Ornano and her cousin follow should this night's experience prove the forerunner of complete shipwreck. She had heard much of Berber revengefulness. Sidi-Malik might forgive his servant. But, if he was so quick in taking offence, might he not, in the near future, decide that it were better to part from the Christians who could not submit to his fits of rabid temper?

At the time she retired, Anoun-Dialo and the Corsican were leaving the fondouk to go in search of the camel-driver. Leyton was left alone. For a while he remained in the court-yard, listening to the singing of negro mountebanks who accompanied dancing girls. They were more intent upon stealing than anything else, he thought. Their mobile eyes of jet and ivory were scanning the surroundings, as they yelled at the top of their voices, covering the drone of derbukha and tom-tom.

Eddoura nedda d'ettidjar
Izra iar' l'anaia ben' Ali;
Ma nesers as nougad el aar;
Ma nerfed its; bezzeff oumri
El azr d'eg; s'ag etsili.*

*Some time ago we escorted traders.
The Son of Ali broke our covenant.
If we submit, dishonor we must fear;
If we fight him, great hardships we must bear.
The covenant is a mountain of fire,
But upon it is built our honor.

The dancers were two Nubian girls of twelve or fourteen years of age, and a ripe mulatto beauty hidden under cumbrous hardware. As the singing was monotonous and the dancing meaningless, he resolved to go and have a look at the Kasbah, whose striking position on top of the hill had caught his eye at the time they were crossing the river.

Near the gate, he passed Djeilma. He went by without being aware of her greeting and of the salutation of the two Lotharios who were with her. The three of them were bowing low with the charming smiles of overgrown children. But the painter had not yet understood. Although he had not altogether failed to notice that Djeilma often rode with curtains open, he attributed this to carelessness and to the unbearable heat of the bassour. Had d'Ornano told him that these manœuvres had earned the Circassian the beating she had received this very morning, his surprise would have amounted to suffocation. His ignorance of Arabic had kept him in the dark touching the subject of the quarrel; and the Corsican, small talker at all times, made it a rule never to peddle gossip.

The Kasbah was not far distant. Intending to watch the rising of the crescent over the sea of palms at his feet, he had just lain down among the cacti growing at the foot of the high wall when the muffled sound of footsteps made him turn his head. He beheld Djeilma sustaining with upraised arms the jar she had just gone to fill. Her beauty, the gracefulness of her biblical attitude so irresistibly caught his eye that he remained a full minute gazing at her in silent wonder. She was perfectly conscious, if not of the exact nature, at least of the extent of the admiration she had aroused, for she remained still as long as his glance

was upon her. Then she deposited her jar, sat down cross-legged and asked him with a smile so bewitching that it made amends for her abominable French:

"Where is Sidi-Malik, Sidi Leïtoun?"

"I don't know," he replied. "Anoun-Dialo and the Captain went to look for him. They told me he would not be back to-night."

"Yes. I thought myself that he would not be back to-night."

Leyton laughed aloud at the candid admission the last sentence implied. He asked her what she would do should Sidi-Malik make an unlooked for reappearance.

"In what would it matter?" she answered. "Didst thou not notice that at the gate I was speaking to two young men? They are now at the foot of the slope and both of them enjoy piercing sight."

This was becoming interesting. Feminine psychology is in Oriental countries a thing so hard to get at that Leyton resolved to make the most of the opportunity the Circassian afforded him. He asked innocently:

"How dost thou know that a Christian does not tell tales on a woman? What led thee to believe that I would not inform Sidi-Malik?"

He thought that Djeilma would answer that the trust she reposed in him was instinctive; that she confided in the Nazarene merely because the general tenor of his behavior led her to believe that he could not, without betraying his own standards, tell her master of her misdeeds. The answer would imply the admission that her notions of right or wrong were the same as his own; and this was precisely what he sought to ascertain. But Djeilma

merely laughed, looking at him sideways, a high light in her pupils, the picture of flirtatious levity and insolence.

"I knew," she said. "Did I not often ride by thy side with the bassour curtains open wide?"

The attack had been so sudden, so unlooked for that Leyton reddened. He answered a little curtly:

"Yes, and I meant to ask thee whether Sidi-Malik is in the habit of allowing his womenfolk to appear before his friends without a haik?"

He realized too late that in her eyes this was a stinging insult. Her eyes darkened as she snapped back:

"Bismillah! I bear witness that all men are fat-headed fools; and the mother of the Prophet knows that I speak the truth! If thy womenfolk suffer Sidi-Malik's glance to fall on their unveiled faces, why should I be reproved? Do I not know that the women of thy race are so contemptuous of decency that they allow all men to take them by the waist and turn them around and around like drunken negresses enjoying the display of their bare arms and shoulders?"

At this broadside, Leyton felt his moral balance fairly stagger within himself. He retorted more gently, anxious to smooth the ruffled temper.

"They follow the custom of their nation. Is it the same?"

"It is the same, Akh Arbi! What are the customs of my nation? I am a Mingrelian. Do women go veiled in the mountains of Kaf?"

The argument was specious enough, since Djeilma, a Mingrelian only by descent, had been born in Ras-Beirut. But the painter thought he had better let the assertion pass unchallenged. He had nothing to gain by entering upon

an idle discussion of points which fashion and local custom will always be allowed to determine regardless of the best judgment of man. He kept silent. Djeilma, plainly victorious, regained her equanimity of humor.

"Sidi-Malik will no more suspect thee of evil," she said enticingly, "than thou wilt suspect him. He knows that Rumis are not like other men. He is aware that they will not steal what they cannot lawfully hold and that they never go the whole length of their desire. He thinks that they will not dare love a woman in defiance of another man's will. He does not fear them."

Blank look from Leyton. She dodged the stare, looked at her knees and chuckled audibly.

"Why should I not show my face to thee?" she went on. "Am I not pretty? Sidi-Malik told me that thou couldst picture all things that are in heaven and earth, except those we do not see,—Allah the Most Great and the djinns. I want thee to make me a picture of my father."

"Is not thy father dead?" he gasped.

"He is dead," she answered very gravely.

"Then how can I make a picture of him? I never saw his face."

The thought of what the old ruffian must have been like made him laugh. But it all entered into Djeilma's calculations. She added very quietly, without looking at him:

"Then if thou canst do no more than paint pictures of living things, I would fain have thee make a likeness of myself. Sidi-Malik told me that he saw thee paint a caravan. Surely I must be more sightly than a camel?"

"Of a truth thou art beautiful," he admitted—and she looked pleased; she had been trying to force the acknowl-

edgment for quite a while—"but does not the Koran forbid the making of pictures of living men, women and animals?"

"Even so," she retorted. "The Persians are Moslem, too, are they not? In Syria, I saw Persian *soffars* make pictures of men, devils and lions on brass trays with a chisel."

"Then they were breaking the commands."

"Perhaps they were. Still, Allah will forgive our sins in the future as he forgave in the past. Couldst thou not make a picture of me if I were dead? Then where is the difference? Why should a man, who can gaze on a woman when she is dead, refuse to look at her when she is young and fair? I do not know all that is written in the Book, but this I know well; the Nazarenes make pictures, and the Persians make pictures, and they do not die. Then why should I not do as I please? Thou shalt be guilty of breaking the commands, not I. And why shouldst thou care? As a painter of pictures, thou breakest the commands every day of thy life, Sidi Leïtoun."

"Thou art not afraid that the evil eye will gaze on this likeness of thine and thereby cause thy death?"

"Why should I?" she retorted with a smile. "I have talismans. Look!" She drew from her bosom, not without some secret intent, he thought, a handful of strange-looking amulets. "And besides I will keep the picture with my jewels," she went on. "The evil look cannot reach through the sides of a coffer, can it?"

"Perhaps not. I am not learned in these things. Be that as it may, I cannot make thee a picture now; I came away from Marakesh without the tools of my craft. But

when we reach Figuig I shall be able to obtain paints. I shall then ask Sidi-Malik whether he deems it proper to let thee sit."

At once she looked radiant.

"Why ask Sidi-Malik, sun of my heart?" she exclaimed. "He knows that picture-making is not proper. Did he not tell me himself that Nazarene picture-makers draw the body and not the garments? And even if he did not object, what use have we for onlookers?"

Leyton was past all speech. At this moment a shot rang in the stillness. Djeïlma got up abruptly. A glance told her that the attention of her companion was engaged. With a swift movement, she folded her arms around his neck, bore him to the ground and kissed him several times. The boldness of the attack left Leyton too astounded to make a move. She had already picked up her jar and was running down the slope, with a laugh in which merriment mingled with mockery, when he got up. She turned to make him a gesture of farewell.

"Do not come just yet," she called. "The shot warned me that Sidi d'Ornano has just come back."

Leyton waited a quarter of an hour. When he reëntered the fondouk he was told by the Corsican that Sidi-Malik had not been seen. The two of them and Anoun-Dialo spent the whole of the next day searching Mader-Sultan for the missing man.

Sidi-Malik returned after nightfall. His fury spent, he bowed and made apologies with the most winning of smiles. It appeared, from the relation he gave of his spree, that he had gone for consolation to the camp of the Ouled-Nails, immediately starting a brawl about a dancer

who had let fall, while performing, the piece of money he had stuck on her forehead. He had then been compelled to use his knives, which he had done with some success. After a pursuit which had obliged him to swim the Draa, he had become uproariously drunk on the intoxicating syrup obtained from the fermentation of Filali dates. While in this condition, he had so diverted a party of Arabs, that the sheikh, learning that he was bound for Figuig with a caravan, had invited him to join forces with his people, who left the next day for Igli. Sidi-Malik had accepted the offer. Now that he had violated all the commands of Muhamed, he came back, as playful and sweet-tempered as a child, to crave everybody's forgiveness and to request d'Ornano to accompany him to the tent of Sheikh Muhamed-ibn-Khadour. The Corsican breathed a sigh of relief when the prodigal son made an attempt at kissing his hand, confessing, with genuine repentance, that although he lost his head from time to time, he would never willingly hurt a friend.

CHAPTER XI

WITH THE CHILDREN OF THE TABLE-LAND

It was the Sahara, the dunes, the waves of sand where camel tracks had been obliterated by the gusts of the last simoom. All forms vibrated in this furnace, and tragical noon, making the ground as hot as sheet iron, drove the men, panting, under the *betoum* tree, the drin brush or, worse still, to the purple splash of shade loitering between the legs of the camels. Gisèle knew now no other dwelling than the low tent of camel's hair called *felidj*, and the brightly colored cage that rolled on top of the camel's hump, its plume-surmounted mast swinging in the molten turquoise with the regularity of a pendulum.

For the last two weeks, ever since they had left Mader-Sultan, they had been travelling under the protection of Sheikh Muhamed. In the company of the Ouled-Ougouni—"the children of the table-land"—a formidable tribe of Arabised Berbers as free as unlimited spaces and swift camels can make a race, they had first gone to the holy city of Tamgrut, then to Daïated-Daoura and were now two days distant from Igli.

It seemed to Gisèle that there never would be an end to this monotonous advance. Around her, it was still the stony Hamadan, as barren and billowy as a rough sea, an expanse of waste that did not boast a tuft of driss, far less an aloe or a cactus.

Yet the splendor of the Saharan nights, the sunsets and sunrises, made up in some measure for the irritation of prickly heat, the numbness at the back of the head and the pasty salivating of thirst. At dawn she was allowed to behold the extremely simple in gorgeous garb, the quintessence of ugliness clothed in the phantasmagoria of dreams, the nihil endowed with all the charm and subtle tones of a garden of Eden.

It was night when she arose. An immensity of treacherousness was lying awake under the stars. Here three nights were superposed. Above the rubies of Aldebaran, above stars of the first magnitude that shone like sapphires and amethysts, burned a sea of constellations totally concealed in others lands where the orbs of heaven look, at best, like the scattered pieces of a broken mirror. Above this, the last, the utmost night of all, a wondrous milky way climbing to the zenith, deluging the Empyrean with a powder of stars.

With the first oblique rays of the approaching sun, the indigo velvet of the silver-nailed firmament turned to turquoise, a turquoise of milk and cerulean. Close to the horizon line, the sky became the vaporous slate blue thin wafts of smoke take in the frosty air of late autumn. This gossamer veil that no wind had blown across the waste was responsible for the unrealistic fairy-like aspect of the desert at this hour. Changes in tonality were so swift that no impression lasted. The now purple Hamadan kept its secret hidden another minute. Then the ball of scarlet shot upwards in the blue haze with the velocity of a shell.

A wine-colored universe emerged from the deep waters of darkness. Mountains, high mountains apparently,

stood, far away to the west, under a rose-colored sky. In the middle distance, waves succeeded to waves, gullies to gullies; billows of cerulean blue, of lavender, of mauve, of red-ochre and burnt sienna, unconsciously calling to mind the Homeric epithet of "sea of the many laughters." Perhaps the glance swept fifty miles of many-colored exquisitely shaded barren waste. A stupendous chaos of rocks scored by sandy winds, too rough to admit of the thought that the Maker had ever bestowed a minute of attention upon it, stole all the colors of the prism and arrayed itself with such gorgeous splendor and barbaric taste as to make the sense of fitness of the beholder stagger in his bosom. Light alone, and the crudest of light, had created this deceptive nonentity. Without it, the Hamadan was the "Country of Fear." With it, it was the Kingdom of Stupor.

Some Ouled-Ougouni, ghostly figures of vaporous ultramarine, were smoking their first cigarette in the high saddle, cross-legged and inexpressibly clown-like, thus roosting on pink camels. Purple in the lilac shadow projected by the high cliff, other camels went to the water. Noiseless and phantasmal, they stretched their serpentine necks in the twilight gloom that still dwelt near the pool, a mud pond whose banks were littered with the dessicated carcasses of dead animals. Their drivers followed on foot, as ghostlike as the beasts themselves. A woman passed with a jar. Another day had begun.

If anything, the sunsets surpassed the splendor of the sunrises, and once it had been given to the travellers to witness a mirage. The hidden magician of the waste had thrown on their path this most stupendous of all surprises—

a lake, a palm forest, some women washing in the shadow of grim city walls, a dark gate, some crooked little streets and an all-dominating kasbah. It was the wonderful hour when camels, donkeys and horsemen came down the steep bank. The universe was a world of velvet tones; and the greater the squalor and filth of the surroundings, the more astonishing their transformation in the incendiary flare of the setting sun. How could the belief in the supernatural die in a land where such things happened? Who could deny the powers of magic and the existence of the djinns? Earnest, intent, the Ouled-Ougouni gazed upon the city of the dead. They not only looked but listened. For, strange to say, a faint sound was perceptible, that of waves. The waves of the unreal lake actually chopped on the unreal beach. It was the loose sand which had begun to sing as the wind carried it over the boulders.

Sidi-Malik had come post-haste to warn his friends not to look, explaining that this was the city built by the ghosts of the waylaid, and that to gaze upon it brought disaster. But there was now nothing to look at. The whimsical Sahara had already retaken what it gave. In the place of the apparition, desolation sat as immutable as ever. Possibly the Hamadan loves antithesis above all else. They were still under the impression of the all too short lived picture when they came upon the bleached bones of what had presumably been a camel-driver.

On the whole they had had no reason to complain thus far. Although progress had been slow, it had been secure. In fact, the run of things had been so smooth that Sidi-Malik had now strong hopes that the dreaded crossing of the Sahara would be accomplished without mishap.

The curiosity of women, and especially that of young fellows, had at first extremely annoyed Gisèle, but since Djeïlma had taken to flirting for both, and she had herself hit upon the plan of simulating madness, she had not been molested.

Ever since the camel-driver had made an official declaration of her insanity, Mlle. de Diolie had become an object of reverence. Not only did the curious-minded shun her palanquin, but she was credited with holding in reserve for those who annoyed her the curse that would cause their cattle to die. Strangely enough, it was especially the behavior of Djeïlma that had improved. She now evinced a good-will and friendliness wholly foreign to her former deportment. It seemed almost that she derived some personal advantage from the supposed insane condition of her European sister. Perhaps the Circassian, at all times loath to share with a rival the attentions of her admirers, felt also that she was now in a position to force Leyton's last defences. In any case, on the day the Ouled-Ougouni pitched camp in the ksar of Ras-el-Aïn she again took the offensive.

This oasis belonged to the Ouled-Ougouni. It was cultivated by sedentary *khames* who shared the produce with the nomad masters. But as settlement of accounts would not be made until October, when the Ouled-Ougouni returning to their winter quarters, would stop to gather the date crop, a stay of over twenty-four hours had been deemed unnecessary by Sheikh Muhamed. The place boasted the luxury of a Hamam. As Leyton, that morning, left it after a much-needed bath, he was accosted by a barefoot boy who handed him a note

written with red ink on a piece of blue sugar-loaf wrapper. Some M'zabite bazar-keeper was evidently responsible for the wording of this piece of gallant literature. The American went to his cousin for translation. The first lines read thus:

"There is no God but God. Praise be given to the Most High. May he have in his keeping our friend Sidi Leftoun whose shining countenance fills our heart.

"Know thou, Sidi Leftoun that Djeïlma hopes that thou art well. Ben-Aïssa, son of Ibrahim, whom thou knowest, has a garden in Ras-el-Aïn. As he would even kill his brother, if his brother had seen my face, the key is mine if I choose, although I laugh at him. Sidi-Malik believes that I am going to the Hamam. Ali, the M'zabite bazar-keeper, whose *soukh* is near the southern gate, will take thee to the door at three o'clock. Do not fail to come according to directions, and be not late; for short are the hours of happiness and long the dreary watches forsaken by sleep. Ever since, etc. . . .

Followed suggestions untranslatable, both on account of plain speaking and intensity of feeling. Gisèle tore the missive into shreds and laughed immoderately as she pictured to herself the closely veiled Djeïlma dictating this extraordinary missive to an elderly trader. Where on earth were the French, English and German literatures? Latin and Byzantine Greek, especially the kind transmitted to posterity by tenth-century bishops, were still in the race; but Arabic, designed for unrestrained profanity, was miles ahead, being obviously a safety valve among languages, to be kept in working order for occasions when extreme suffering clamors for immediate relief. Leyton noticed that the messenger still stood in the dust, looking at him with sober impudence.

"*Roh, fissa, beni-kelb!*" he shouted in Arabic, momentarily forgetting that he was mute. Then he stopped for want of epithets, and it was Gisèle who asked the boy how much he had been given to bring this piece of filth. The messenger instantly pointed to the painter.

"The woman told me he would pay the reward," he said.

They laughed at this further instance of effrontery. While Leyton was diligently searching his belt for an elusive Spanish douro, Gisèle inquired:

"How much did she give thee? If she gave thee nothing thou art paid; for no fool is entitled to a reward. If she gave thee little, he will perhaps make up for it. How much?"

"True as there is no God but God, Saïda, she only gave me a mitkal."

Again Gisèle laughed. The boy had sworn; but greed alone made him tell the truth. These natives must, she thought, be born with the knowledge of the human heart and all that dwells therein, since an eight-year-old boy was able to figure that a mitkal would not loom very large in the eyes of a lover. Leyton gave her the coin.

"Perhaps he will give thee a douro," she resumed. "But what wilt thou do for a douro, if thou art willing to run the risk of being spanked for a mitkal?"

"I shall bless the Protector of the poor," the child replied with emphatic seriousness, "and I shall buy me dates to eat. I went empty-bellied since last Friday at sunset."

Gisèle glanced towards a fair-sized abdominal protuberance shining with fat. The naked barbarian was undoubtedly well fed. She did not, however, deem it worth while to challenge this additional lie.

"Thou wilt keep thy mouth shut!" she dictated. "Silence is gold. It's only silver in this case; but a loose tongue means twenty stripes. Thou wert unable to give him the note. He had gone riding. Now take the oath and the douro is thine."

"Shall I swear by Muhamed's beard and the holy waters of Zem-Zem?" asked the messenger. "May Iblis carry me to the Hell of Hadramaout if I break my word. . . . Thanks! Now that the money is all mine, I shall betake myself to the mosque to bless the names of the Most generous strangers."

"But thou didst not even ask our names!" the young woman retorted, laughing. "No matter. May Allah return the blessing on thy head. What wilt thou do with the douro?"

"Buy sugar from Ali, who owes money to my father," the boy replied. "I can buy cheap. I will sell it to the women of the Ouled-Ougouni."

"And thus thou shalt earn another douro before sunset?"

"*Oua, Saïda.*" The child had already gone. Gisèle was so anxious to pour the whole story into d'Ornano's ear that she promptly sent Leyton about his business. No sooner had the Corsican learned how she had made the boy swear to hold his tongue, than he advised the painter to go for a ride and to take great care not to be back before five o'clock. He gave as his reason that Djeïlma might become hostile should her advances be met by direct refusal. Gisèle strongly suspected that he merely sought to frighten the American and keep him away for the rest of the afternoon, but she did not interfere. Leyton followed the Corsican's advice and retired early.

At about ten o'clock that night shrieks and sobbing issuing from the next felidj awoke d'Ornano. He shook Leyton, who was snoring, and bade him listen. Sidi-Malik was thrashing Djeilma. The crucial thought that the camel-driver had, in some way, become acquainted with the morning's episode filled the artist with dismay. He remained awake until the Corsican, satisfied that the joke had lasted long enough, suggested that in all probability Ben-Aïssa, who gave Djeilma the key, had followed her to the garden; and that Sidi-Malik, who kept close watch on half a dozen admirers of his wife, had dogged his footsteps. This reassured Leyton, who went back to sleep, feeling that he was now provided with an excuse. Should the Circassian call him to account, he would be able to reply that he had gone riding to divert the suspicions of her master.

He never awoke to the true nature of the joke that had been played upon him. The new bond of complicity that linked d'Ornano to his cousin prevented either of them from opening his eyes. The Corsican and the young woman had profited by his absence to spend the afternoon together.

It was as Gisèle had suspected. If d'Ornano had held aloof so long it was due to the conviction he entertained that Leyton was virtually an accepted suitor. Even now, she could not get him to say a word in the painter's presence. But when she had him cornered, he thawed out without compelling her to exert undue pressure and soon became strangely interesting. It was not that he disliked Leyton; on the contrary, they had become the best of friends. But he had some of the failings of the actor, not the least of which was his insistence on keeping the stage to himself.

Yet she could not call him vain, mechanical or empty-headed. Action was the very essence of his life, that was all. His thoughts themselves were dynamic. It was as they were speaking about Corsica that she was struck by this fact. D'Ornano had undertaken to establish that special conditions had bred in the island a community so peculiar that it was a mistake to apply to its members the ordinary standards.

"Since the dawn of history we have been in the midst of things," he vouchsafed; "and yet so far removed from the general movement of civilization that we have remained a people of shepherds. The Carthaginians and the Romans came on the island solely for timber. They left us, on the whole, very much alone. But since the fourth century we have fought in turn the Vandals, the Byzantines, the Arabs, the Normans of Sicily, the Pisans, the Genoese, the Germans, the Aragonese, the Turks, the English and the French. We established three republics. We made a king of a comic-opera adventurer who knew so well his business that he sold Ajaccio to the Jews on the day we compelled him to flee for his life.* We sent colonels to the king of France who, in the estimation of that monarch, were worth ten thousand men.† We provided the Pope with *garde-nobles*, the Sultan with corsairs. At Lepanto we fought on both sides. We made

* Theodore, Baron de Neuhoff. He kissed a country girl and a revolution followed. The hapless sovereign fled through a window, half clad, hotly pursued by the girl's brother.

† Sampierro, who married Vanina d'Ornano. His wife left him and fled to Aix, in Southern France, with her son Alphonse d'Ornano, who died in 1610 a field-marshal. The day Sampierro succeeded in joining her, he humbly begged her pardon, strangled her, and wore a mourning dress ever afterwards.

alliances with everybody, always with the view of destroying Genoa. When Bonifacio was besieged by the Genoese, starvation reached the point when the mother's milk had to be given to the soldiers. Happily, the Turk Dragut ran his galleys into the harbor in the nick of time. But we always were a small people; and in three centuries the Corsican vendetta destroyed by murder over two hundred thousand men. So it was not until we made Napoleon the instrument of our revenge that we were able to take Genoa by the throat, strangle her and let her rot. You say that mathematicians, statesmen, sailors and great captains are the only crop we raise? Perhaps. We have been corsairs and outlaws so long that it is little wonder if we still retain the characteristics of the preying animal."

"The characteristics of the preying animal." Gisèle made mental note. And yet it was evident to her that the Corsican was not at all a desperado. She thought it interesting that, of all French dramatists, Corneille was the one he loved best. Corneille, the apostle of duty and will power.

Although the Corsican denied that he sought the triumph of will power for its own sake, he seemed to conceive will power only as applied to the fulfilment of some disquieting extraordinary duty. This conception of heroism was so natural with him that, when questioned on the subject by the young woman, who was extremely fond of demonstrations *par l'absurde*, he could not find it in his heart to condemn Simeon Stylites, who spent a lifetime on top of a column for the empty pleasure of proving to himself the power of his indomitable will. She then asked him whether he did not view man as a caged animal whose worth lies solely in the intensity of his efforts to break jail;

and if he was sure that, from the bottom of his heart, he did not secretly worship the rebellious Lucifer?

She soon found that his notions of personal and family honor were just as strange. He told her how, while a second lieutenant, he had left Algiers without notice to go and help a cousin of his who had committed murder. For twelve days, compelling the constabulary to cover twice the whole length of the island, he had been "the hare that teaches running to a rabbit," to quote the expression she heard him use. He was risking his beloved commission at that game; but fortunately they had landed in Sardinia without mishap.

It turned out that the girl in the case, after wild prayers to the crucifix of her bedroom and the Madonnas of the cross-roads, had walked all the way to Bonifacio and there had hired a boat. The two cousins were still on the rocks, on the Sardinian side of the straits, when they met her. They had tried to induce her to go back. She had threatened suicide, swearing that she would henceforth live in the brush with her hero, follow him to prison if he was captured and die if he was killed.

D'Ornano spoke of this Lætitia with an admiration that astonished Gisèle. She reflected that, if the Corsican was wont to judge all women according to such a standard, he must find her own love of ratiocinating pretentious, her whole behavior unmaidenly and her determination to remain a self-asserting personality altogether unnatural. Yet she was not so sure. Something had prompted her to ask him whether it was at her father's request that he had carried her away from Marakesh. He had left the tent without answering.

CHAPTER XII

THE GATHERING OF ISLAM

The caravan broke camp at an early hour. As was customary with him, Leyton saddled his horse and went for a ride. He had wandered some distance away from the main body of the column, when suddenly shots and yells made him fear that the caravan was attacked; the shots being altogether too numerous to countenance the suspicion that the uproar arose from the discovery of an every-day murder, and that friends and relatives of the slain husband were hot on the trail of the wife's paramour.

He brought his horse to a stop. It was not yet half-past four, and the silver nails of firmament had scarcely begun to pale in the turquoise of the eastern sky. The cold shadows hung so heavy over the stony table-land that he could not even guess at what lay two hundred feet in front. He had wandered so far that he knew little of his position and was sure of nothing beyond the fact that the column lay on the side from which came the bleating of sheep, the neighing of horses and the shrill call of irate mother camels. It had never occurred to him that his position would prove extremely insecure in the event of a *rezzou* of prowlers attempting a *coup de main* on the property of his hosts. The shots that now crackled in every direction convinced him that such an attack had been made. He

wondered what course of action lay open to him in this juncture. By retracing his steps he would not only run the risk of meeting with the thieves themselves, but of being mistaken for one of them.

He was deliberating whether he had not better dismount and lie on the ground to avoid stray shots when the unmistakable hiss of a bullet came to remind him that it was high time to decide. Reluctantly, he drew his right foot from the stirrup. Perhaps it was fortunate that his hesitancy had lasted so long. He had barely reined his horse and grabbed the pommel to dismount when a ghostly shadow born of the gloom materialized into a mehari rider who made straight for him with pointed lance. He wheeled his horse around and used his spurs. The animal was good and he soon found himself alone. But he had caught sight of a strange apparition: an unknown being in indigo garments who went veiled like a woman and carried a two-handed sword and a long spear. As he galloped straight ahead, other shadows, other mehari riders in the same garb of blue, crossed his path. He succeeded in avoiding them all, probably because the prowlers were themselves in full flight and were more concerned with their own safety than with the problematic laurels they would win in an encounter with a lone horseman. He ran at full speed into a troop of Ouled-Ougouni, among whom he recognized Sidi-Malik.

The first word which struck his ear was one which shed light upon the whole adventure. Aït-Litzam—the Tuaregg! As soon as they were alone, he asked the camel-driver if these were really the "Forsaken of God," the fabulous mehari riders of the far South. That Tuaregg should

come so far north on prowling expeditions was a thing that he could not understand. Sidi-Malik assured him that, in the hope of plunder, they had followed the *harka*, the contingent levied by Bou-Amel.

A few minutes later they met d'Ornano. The first thought of the Corsican had been to lead what men he could rally to the rear, to protect the bassours.

"Your going alone and so far is an imprudence which you must avoid in the future," he said to Leyton. "Bou-Amel is in Igli, otherwise the Tuaregg would not be met so far north. As he is a personal foe of mine, the least that could happen to you, in the event of capture, is that he would provide plenty of room between your head and your shoulders. So long as we are protected by the *anaïa* of the Ouled-Ougouni we are safe. But we part from them to-night. If anybody should suspect that you are not a bonafide Moslem and a mute, we shall meet with disaster. Follow my advice and remain near the bassours."

"Who is this Bou-Amel?" asked Leyton.

"He is the man who engineered the massacre of Monnier and Trafaëli," came the answer. "When Monnier was struck from behind, I snatched a rifle from somebody's hands and fired at Bou-Amel. I hit him squarely. As this cost him the left eye, it goes without saying that, if I am caught, I shall lose both eyes and a good many things besides. You won't be treated with more consideration."

"But how do you know that Bou-Amel is in the vicinity?"

"You have seen the 'veiled people,' have you not? For ten years Bou-Amel has had no better friend than their *amenokal*. You can take it for granted that when the Tuaregg send north a rezzou of this strength, our com-

munications are cut and the four tribes of the confederation are on the warpath. I should not be surprised in the least if Abd-er-Rhaman had left Taza for Figuig, and if Bou-Amel, at the head of the Saharan contingents was on his way to join him. We shall see. I don't think we shall have to wait long. Unless I am much mistaken, something will turn up before twelve o'clock."

The presence of Bou-Amel in or near Igli became a matter of certainty in the early afternoon, when the caravan caught sight of the cloud of dust raised by an approaching body of *goums*. There was considerable stir among the Ouled-Ougouni by this time. A fantasia was about to begin, and every man, in his gaudiest apparel of bright clothing and strange weapons, had mounted his horse and taken his place behind his sheikh. Excited females peeped through the curtains of all bassours, dispensing smiles and yells of encouragement, while children had already begun to make the powder speak, shooting the dust with bullets in utter unconcern of possible accidents. Although Bou-Amel had not left Igli, the sheikh in command of the advancing troop was no smaller a personage than his lieutenant Abd-el-Khader, a Sheriff from Tafilelt and as such a descendant of the Prophet. The honor done Sheikh Muhamed and his people was in no wise lessened by the fact that this Sheriff was second cousin to the Pretender.

Leyton also dressed in his best. He had fully determined to take part in the *lab-el-baroda* that was about to commence. Since he was the guest of the tribe, the risk of being accidentally shot by the bullet of an unknown enemy was small, and this would be his last chance. This very evening their little troop would leave the camp of

the Ouled-Ougouni to sleep another time in the narrow cells of a fondouk. On the morrow they would start alone for Figuig, leaving Sheikh Muhamed to discuss as best he could the terms of the agreement that would induce his people to leave their women, children and belongings in Igli to follow the Maddhi—it was known that Bou-Amel had assumed this title—to the camp of Abd-er-Rhaman.

The two columns had come to a stop two hundred yards away from each other. Tom-toms, fifes and derbukhas began to play a *nouba* as languorous as a love song and as jerking as a jig performed on the bag-pipes of Gordon Highlanders. Sheikh Muhamed rode a few lengths forward and made a sudden signal.

Away went the first horses. Abd-el-Khader's goums were already in full career. Leyton's heart leapt when he felt himself caught in the whirlpool and when he heard the first crackling of shots. This was wonderfully like war; and, after all, there was nothing like a good horse, firm ground and a bright sky! For a while he gave himself, soul and body, to the pure delight of running amuck, riding at top speed, yelling and shooting like mad in the midst of a sea of horsemen. The two troops, a total of nearly three thousand men, came in contact. Dust and powder smoke made it almost impossible to see. But such was the skill of the men in the front ranks that the painter, who followed Sidi-Malik with blind confidence, found himself clear of the opposite party without experiencing even the jostling he had looked for.

He then withdrew far enough to command a full view of the ensemble without losing sight of the details. Both bodies had already mingled and were assuming another

order. Sheikh Muhamed and Abd-el-Khader had left the ranks, greeted each other and exchanged kisses. They were now passing their men in review. An ever-flowing torrent of horsemen poured past them, in ranks eight deep, at full gallop, shooting, yelling and throwing up their long guns. The gorgeous spectacle derived perhaps a greater relative importance from the soberness of the background. Not a shrub, not a sign of verdant vegetation was in sight. Moving specks of intense color entered and left the cloud of powder smoke that rolled close to the ground in front of the two chiefs. The white mass of this vapor made a violent contrast with the chrome yellow of the stony Hamadan and the ochrous red of the argillaceous cliffs that towered behind, cliffs just high enough to eliminate from the picture, without overshadowing the whole, the part of the sky, close to the horizon line, that was not of the most intense cobalt. Close by, the halted caravan—children in white gandourahs, kneeling and munching camels, striped bassours, capering rams and braying donkeys blissfully rolling themselves in the dust, howling yellow dogs, naked negro servants and scattered baggage—gave the needed note of picturesque disorder. But for all its barbaric romance, the scene was not without its revolting realism. Leyton saw two men, who had been shot, dragged aside, while an unconscious child, his left hand blown off by an overloaded pistol, was being carried away by his hysterical mother. Nearly every horse he laid eyes upon, foaming and exhausted, bled from the mouth and from the ribs, stabbed pitilessly by the long silver spur of the horseman.

The lab-el-baroda lasted as long as the overworked horses, alternately driven at top speed and stopped dead in

full career, could stand the strain. It was not until the excitement was over that the painter found time for reflection. He went to join d'Ornano, who looked concerned. The Corsican told him that the Ouled-Ougouni were sure to join their whole force to the fighting strength already mustered by Bou-Amel. The Maddhi's display of eloquence—he was preaching a holy war in Igli—was more in the nature of an artistic literary finish than anything else. Up his sleeve he kept arguments much stronger than those marshalled in ordinary theological disputes. "Join me and you plunder the earth, thereby gaining also Paradise," did not go without the alternative: "Whoever refuses to fight the Christian dogs will have to fight my spahis." Sheikh Muhamed was a nomad cut upon the ordinary pattern. He was not in the least averse to plundering his guest of the previous day immediately after parting from him. There would be no sleep that evening. The fugitives would have to steal out of Igli as soon as the moon would be up.

An hour before sunset they came in sight of the oasis. The river, with its palm plantations, lay at the foot of an enormous cliff. A strong bordj crowned the hilltop, encircling, within its crenellated ramparts of mud and straw, a theological school, a mosque, a caravansery and the tomb of Sidi-Ziggurt, Bou-Amel's great-grandfather. The whole constituted a *zaouïa*, whose revenues were divided equally among all the male descendants of the holy man. Bou-Amel was here entirely at home. It was supremely evident that the *baraka* of his ancestor had been transmitted to himself alone, since none of his brothers and cousins had soldiers at their back.

The village, a typical Saharan ksar, was built half-way up the slope. A belt of dilapidated walls protected it on the river-side. In remote times, troglodytic populations had dwelt in caves hewn in the face of the cliff, and some houses were still built half in the open, half underground.

Traces of violence met the sight of the travellers as soon as they reached the gates. The soldiery in possession of the bordj were evidently inclined to act with the brutality of conquerors. Dread was written on the faces of all who, for some reason of age or sex, had been prevented from joining the harka. The aspect of the ksar spoke little in favor of the authority wielded by Bou-Amel over his lawless followers. All acknowledged his sanctity and were ready to follow him in the hope of plunder; but all shirked discipline and were not even disposed to respect the personal property of their chief. It was true that the signs of his vengeance were everywhere in evidence. The division existing between the tribes and their inherent hostility to each other furnished the chieftain with ever-ready executioners. An incredible number of decollated heads adorned the gate. As the different tribes succeeded each other in doing patrol duty, all who were not friends of the guards ran, if caught looting, the risk of their heads. The proofs of this vigilance were forwarded in bags to Bou-Amel. Emulation was keen between the commanders; and many a poor devil, innocent of all wrong, but with no relations to protect him and no money to spend in bribes, had been led, hands tied, to the chaouch.

Sidi-Malik soon furnished Leyton and d'Ornano with a number of equally sickening details. Bou-Amel, having decreed that each ksar in Touat should contribute towards

the expenditures of the war in proportion to its population, had left part of his army south to levy the tax, instructing his lieutenants to cut off the noses, the hands or the feet, according to the gravity of the offence, of all who proved unruly. These trophies were forwarded in bags to Igli. But, lacking impressiveness, they were merely dumped in front of the main gate, where all the carrion and offal from the town found its way and lay rotting. The grinning heads alone were allowed to jeer at the living from the other side of the passage. Stuck on broad-bladed spears, they stood a few inches above a stain of dried blood that had turned to a disgusting brown on the limewash of the ramparts.

With the view of keeping up appearances, the travellers had entered the town with the Ouled-Ougouni. But d'Ornano swore that their stay in this abode of fiends would be as short as possible. Instead of going to the fondouk, as Shiekh Muhamed thought they would, he decided to leave immediately by another gate and to await in the gardens the hour when flight would be safest. A short stay would be necessary, if only to obtain supplies and enough water to last until the caravan should reach the nearest well. When Leyton spoke of going to Sheikh Muhamed to take formal leave and thank him for his past kindness, the Corsican shrugged his shoulders, saying that if the chief of the Ouled-Ougouni got wind of their intention to steal out of Igli, he would keep a party of camel-riders in readiness to pursue them.

CHAPTER XIII

“WHO CAN ACCOUNT FOR A RUMI’S THOUGHTS?”

Imperceptibly slowing down, Sidi-Malik managed to let all the Ouled-Ougouni go past him. He then stopped, dismounted and made a pretence of readjusting the breast strap of Djeïlma’s camel. The field was now clear. They turned to the right, and soon lost themselves in a labyrinth of narrow streets.

The thoroughfares were apparently given over to the soldiery. A peep through the closed curtains caused Gisèle to realize the weight of the military rule under which the people of the ksar were groaning. They kept indoors, awaiting, with their valuables ready for flight or concealment, the departure of Bou-Amel. They had paid the war tax without a murmur. Their only care now was to prevent the street brawls for which the nearest householder would be held responsible, and which would be taken as a pretext for renewed plunder. As a consequence, only men in the Maddhi’s retinue and the characteristic rabble that follows in the wake of undisciplined troops were to be met in the streets—Aissaoua, musicians, mountebanks of every description, khaouadjis, snake-charmers, beggars, popular orators, sellers of hemp and dainties, sneak-thieves, Jewish pawnbrokers and money-lenders in black caps, and, above all, dancing girls and harlots. It seemed to Gisèle that all the Ouled-Naïl

women in the Sahara had taken up their abode in Igli. In the street they now followed, she counted no less than forty of them. Corpulent, flabby and painted, they sat motionless and ominously silent in the darkness beyond the threshold of their doors.

Sidi-Malik's loquacity was both amusing and alarming. He had made an impressive display of his various weapons and had ordered Anoun-Dialo to turn up his sleeves to show his muscles. He also addressed a jocular remark to every man met on the way, frequently alluding to the fact that he had just learned in a conversation with Abd-el-Khader and Skeikh Muhamed that Bou-Amel's harka would, on the morrow, be increased by the whole fighting force of the Ouled-Ougouni. Gisèle knew that he would not claim the acquaintance of such men as Abd-el-Khader and Sheikh Muhamed unless he was thoroughly afraid. His dread appeared to her less ludicrous when she reflected that he was not addicted to showing the white feather, and that, as a consequence, the danger must be real.

At last they reached the walls. Night had now fallen. For three-quarters of an hour they wandered through date palms, aloes and cacti, in search of a secluded spot which would be concealed from view and on the confines of the oasis. They finally made a stop and divided tasks. The moon would not rise before ten o'clock. They would profit by the delay to get the necessary supplies. Anoun-Dialo would go back to town after food and water. Sidi-Malik would sell the two remaining horses. Leyton would remain in camp to protect the women and watch over the baggage. D'Ornano would go to ascertain the strength of the harka Bou-Amel intended to lead against Figuig.

He warned Leyton not to light a fire and to avoid making any noise, directing also Anoun-Dialo to gag the camels, which were all males, so that they could not utter any call in case a caravan should pass. Gisèle and Djeilma were advised to take some sleep. They would, after this, travel eighteen hours at a stretch, and at high speed. And it was impossible, at least for the French girl, to sleep in the bassour.

Leyton was soon left alone. An hour passed drearily away and his craving for a smoke became unendurable. Absent-mindedly, he dug into his belt for matches and tobacco wherewith to light a pipe. He had hardly blown the match out when a voice, a whisper heard close to his ear turned the current of his thoughts.

"I thought that we were not to light any fire, Sidi Leïtoun?"

He remained motionless, wondering how Djeilma had so managed to approach him that not even the faintest sound had warned him of her presence. Again she whispered.

"This is dangerous, Sidi Leïtoun. Perhaps Ben-Aïssa has taken the trail and is hidden in the shrubs. Who knows? We are no longer under Sheikh Muhamed's protection, and not only does Ben-Aïssa know that Sidi-Malik is a rich man, but he also remembers that he has given him a beating."

Again Leyton refrained from answering. He did not know yet if this piece of news was intended to carry a carefully veiled threat, a warning, or if it was merely a preamble. He waited. If he well understood Djeilma, it was certain that she would not beat around the bush very long. Her next remark came to verify this impression.

"Speak to me," she ordered almost angrily. "Inshallah! Shall I be despised by a Rumi? Why didst thou not come to the garden in Ras-el-Aïn? I waited till six o'clock."

"Why should I have brought upon myself the beating Ben-Aïssa got in my place?" he said coolly. "Am I a fool that I should, at a woman's word, disdain to look forward before I leap?"

"*Ya illah!*" she exclaimed contemptuously. "Who but a coward would mind a beating where a woman is concerned? But I know thee to be no coward, Sidi Leïtoun. Thou knowest very well that Sidi-Malik did not find me with Ben-Aïssa, or he would have killed us both. He beat us simply because he had suspicions. But there were two entrances to the garden. I would not allow myself to be caught in a trap, would I? Art thou afraid of Sidi-Malik?"

"No," he answered very seriously. "A man cannot very well be afraid of another and still have him for a friend. With a knife, Sidi-Malik is the best man; but he will be the first to acknowledge that with a revolver I can shoot straighter and quicker than he can. He saved my life once. We are brothers. He, Sidi d'Ornano and I be three brothers."

"Well?"

"A brother must be faithful to his brother. That is why I did not go to the garden."

There was a short period of silence. Djeïlma's low laugh warbled in the night's fragrance with the sibilance of running water.

"Bismillah!" she mused aloud. "Who will ever account for a Rumi's thoughts? Sidi-Malik betrayed the

Senussiya for money. Were not the Senussiya his brothers?"

Leyton did not answer. She went on:

"Thou art a Nazarene; and Sidi-Malik will not even eat with thee, Sidi Leïtoun. Dost thou really believe that he thinks more of a Christian than he does of his own brethren? I tell thee, he is faithless. I know that he betrayed the Senussiya. It is wise, therefore, not to place any trust in what he says."

"But why is he faithful to me, then," interrupted Leyton, who possessed a man's keen discernment in all matters of friendship. "Why is he also faithful to Sidi d'Ornano? I shall tell thee. It is because he knows that we two are as fearless as he is, and that, like him, we love danger for danger's sake. He knows this ever since we went together to the Kutubia. If Sidi-Malik respects few things, at least he respects fearless men. I will trust him for that reason. He knows that he met his own kind when Sidi d'Ornano and I came to him."

While delivering himself of this piece of bragging, he kept enough sense of humor to smile. He fully realized that a declaration of this kind would appear highly ludicrous to Gisèle; but this was the land where every man sang his own praises, and Djeïlma was very sober and attentive, making no attempt to conceal her deep admiration and reverence.

"But surely thou dost not believe that Sidi-Malik would remain faithful if he loved thy wife," she retorted. "The very knowledge that thou possessest a heart for revenge would urge him on. He knows well that Abd-er-Rhaman is also fearless. And who art thou, who is Sidi

d'Ornano, when compared to Mouley Abd-er-Rhaman-es-Sheriff, the Commander of the Faithful, the very offspring of Mohamed? Sidi-Malik prays five times a day and keeps the fast of Ramadan. Abd-er-Rhaman is not only the Emir-el-Mumenin but he is also a very fearless man. What sort of respect did Sidi-Malik show him, pray thee? He caught him by the neck, like a beggar, and kidnapped him."

The argument was scarcely answerable. Leyton felt beaten and made the mistake of showing it. Djeilma, profiting by the temporary advantage she had gained, went on, making straight for the goal she had all this time endeavored to reach.

"So will Sidi-Malik, some day, try to ascertain the depths of thy courage," she said. "It is true that he despises danger. He would ere this have kidnapped thy cousin were she not a *maboul*. But he respects insane people. Yet it is not too late for him to do it, perhaps. Thou shouldst know that it is not wise to let another man strike first."

Leyton opened his mouth to take breath and to answer, but he thought better of it and held his tongue. It was indeed lucky that the love of argumentation had not led him to acknowledge that Gisèle was not insane. He kept quiet, lingering a minute over Sidi-Malik's puzzling inconsistencies. Djeilma saw her chance to progress a step farther.

"Do not tell me any more that Sidi-Malik is thy brother," she said. "He has no faith. But he is wise, and he follows the inclination of his own heart. All that the Koran requires of a man is that he shall pray five times a

day and bestow alms. There is no sin, since Allah will forgive in the future as he forgave in the past. Did not Muhamed prescribe ablutions to wash away sin? Did he not take to himself Zainab, the wife of his adopted son Zaid, and Miriam, the Egyptian captive? Is it not written in the Koran that Gabriel, on both occasions, came down from heaven to ratify the deed, and did not the Prophet, to obey the commands, spend thirty days with Miriam on a mountain top, threatening Ayesha with a divorce if she did not cease her wailing? Who are we that we should be freer from sin than our Lord Muhamed? Perhaps I should have told thee all this before I asked thee to follow me to the garden."

"God Almighty!" thought Leyton. "Is this the creed of these people?" He was now plainly helpless. He attempted to turn the tables by opposing his own religious principles to those professed by the fair tempter. This was too absurd, after all; too much like the adventure of St. Anthony with the outspoken, if ethereal, Queen of Sheba! And not even a friendly pig was at hand to help him cry, "Get thee behind me, Satan."

"And still I would have refrained from coming," he retorted. "I am a Rumi, and it is written in the Book of the Nazarenes that a man shall love only his own wife. It is because he obeys the rules set down by his Prophet Aïssa that a Rumi refrains from seeking life and plunder as Moslems are wont to do."

"Inshallah! What a man of lies thou art!" Djeïlma presently ejaculated. "Do I not know that the Inglis grabbed Egypt, and the Franzawis the whole of Moghrib merely for plunder's sake? Where is the difference be-

tween a Moslem and a Rumi? A man is a man and lays hands on what he can get, unless indeed he be a fat fool or a coward. Where is the man with a knife and a stout heart who would shun his neighbor's wife? That is not a true reason, Sidi!"

Leyton gave it up. Plainly Djeilma had her doubts touching the value of Christian standards; and her ideas of morality were so elastic that he saw no way to escape being dumped on top of the common heap of fat fools and cowards. In civilized lands he might not have cared; here he strenuously objected to being thus classified by a beautiful woman. He held his peace, raking diligently his stock of ideas for a victorious answer. He knew that Djeilma was not to be put off by arguments that would not satisfy her practical if somewhat peculiar logic. She went on without waiting.

"What is it that kept thee back, then?" she asked. "I know that thy French cousin is a beautiful woman; although her hair is not black, her nails are short and not dyed, and she does not know the use of kohl, henna and proper tattooing. But I am as beautiful as she is. Look at me! Moreover, she is a maboul; and who would love a maboul? Look at me! Thou hast seen me in daytime. Thou art a maker of pictures, and thou knowest. Indeed, everybody knows that Mingrelian women are the most handsome of all. If it was not so, why should our parents sell us when we are yet little girls, and why should we become inmates of every rich man's harem? Why is it that thou refuseth to love me, then? I succeeded in kissing thee, the other day, and my whole heart melted. Leave that woman to Sidi-Malik and let us depart!

We need not stay in Moghrib; I shall follow thee to thy country. Say only that thou wilt take me, and I shall even go the length of stabbing Sidi-Malik while he sleeps."

The rustle of a dress brought them both to their feet as she was in the very act of kissing him. For the last few minutes Leyton had been feeling extremely uncomfortable; but now that he became aware that Gisèle had witnessed at least part of the ridiculous scene, he prayed that the earth would open to swallow him. The ghastly moon that rose behind the bordj now lighted the palm groves, the silvery waters and the unfathomable sands. They were still in the mighty shadow the cliff threw across the ravine; but there was light enough to enable them to see each other's faces. At this moment that of Gisèle was the only one to show mirth. Djeilma was defiant; and the painter, stock-still and open-mouthed, was the picture of amazement and dismay, on the whole a sorry sight.

He did not attempt to explain. Not knowing how Gisèle would interpret the scene, he thought it was better to wait for developments. If she had heard the end of their conversation, explanations were useless; if she had not, he could not very well load Djeilma with the whole responsibility without even waiting until she had turned her back.

He plainly expected that the Circassian would retreat. But Djeilma was a daughter of valiant clansmen accustomed to die fighting. She instantly decided upon the offensive.

"Send that woman away!" she ordered. "It is not

proper that insane people should interfere, . . . Wait! I will take her back myself."

She had already taken two steps forward with an intent which, considering the state of her temper, might have been less innocent than her words when Leyton caught her by the wrist.

"It is not proper that insane people should be interfered with," he said sternly. "Allah speaks with the lips of the maboul; therefore they should go unrestrained. All sane people know that."

He let go as he finished the sentence. Djeilma, flushed with uncontrolled fury, had stamped her foot and wrenched her wrist free by biting him. He caught the flash of a naked blade. Instantly stepping in front of Gisèle, he covered the Circassian with his revolver.

"Thou art a snake and nothing more," he said. "This is enough. Go back to the bassour! Go back or I shall tell Sidi-Malik. Perhaps he will not relish the thought of being murdered during his sleep."

Djeilma threw the knife with such accuracy that he had to dodge to avoid being punctured in the shoulder.

"Allah Kerim!" she cried. "Tell him! What do I care? Sidi-Malik shall die and his belongings shall be mine. As for thee and that woman, I shall see what I can devise; but I shall be repaid for this insult if Bou-Amel is still alive and if Ben-Aïssa has not forgotten the lashes Sidi-Malik gave him. The curse of Si-Abdul-Ghazwani be on the mother of thy children, Sidi Leïtoun. See! Over my right shoulder do I spit. Their names are Ben-Hamara—her offspring—and Beni-Kelb—thine own. I have not enough time for all the names of thine own mother."

Whereupon she faced about and ran. When Leyton, realizing all that the threat implied, started in pursuit, she had already disappeared beyond the tall reeds that overgrew the banks of the nearest canal.

CHAPTER XIV

THE PREY THE OASIS SENDS TO THE DESERT

"Not that way, Ben-Aïssa! Did not the woman say they were going to Figuig? We will find them close to the well of Aïn-el-Hamam."

The first horseman swerved so sharply that he pushed d'Ornano against the wall. The Corsican's first impulse was to draw his revolver, but seeing the number of the party he desisted. The rapid scene had taken place under the city gates. The Ouled-Ougouni had caught up with him as he was leaving the town to join his friends.

He had recognized the voice of Mustapha, son of Sheikh Muhamed. The name of Ben-Aïssa, coupled to a reference to the direction the caravan intended to take, filled him at once with the suspicion that Djeïlma was not a stranger to the affair. In all likelihood, Ben-Aïssa and his companions, all of them ardent admirers of the Circassian, had begun investigations as soon as she had been missed. It had taken them but a short time to search all caravanseries in Igli and reach the conclusion that the caravan had left the town. The Corsican began to run.

He knew that neither Sidi-Malik nor Anoun-Dialo had yet had time to complete their purchases; and Leyton, alone with the women, was no match for a dozen horsemen.

The anaïa, protecting the travellers against the covetousness of their hosts, had become void the minute the caravan had set foot within the walls of the ksar. Ben-Aïssa had wrongs to avenge on Sidi-Malik. The fact that Mustapha accompanied his cousin warranted the suspicion that Sheikh Muhamed was a party to the undertaking. The Corsican hurried forward as fast as he could run, fearing lest he should join Leyton too late to prevent a disaster.

The only hope he dared entertain he derived from the fact that the caravan had not stopped in the vicinity of Aïn-el-Hamam, as the would-be raiders had been led to suppose. If he could but reach the halting-place before them, he might yet, with Leyton's help, succeed in effecting their flight. But this course was not without its danger, since Sidi-Malik and Anoun-Dialo, in their search for the missing caravan, would run the risk of being intercepted by the raiders.

He was trying to solve the difficulty, when the sight of a white object ahead caused him to slow down. He stopped, wondering whether it was not a haïk drying on a bush by the river-side. Then the thought struck him that he had perhaps come unaware upon a lone sentinel posted here by the Ouled-Ougouni to report the movements of all parties. The object was motionless. But as he hesitated the mysterious piece of linen made a sudden movement and disappeared with a sound resembling the flapping of wings. It was a woman. Startled, d'Ornano sought cover, feeling sure, however, that the woman had not observed him and that there was another reason for her sudden flight. As he did so, the erratic being he had already likened to a will-o'-the-wisp issued from the bushes,

crossed at a run a moonlit area and again disappeared behind the corner of a low wall. The reason for her flight became plain to the Corsican when he saw a man issue from the river-bed and examine with great care the immediate surroundings. Obviously, this new actor was non-plussed as to the direction the fugitive had taken. The realization that Djeïlma had escaped and that Leyton was in pursuit flashed like lightning through d'Ornano's mind. Before he had time to decide upon a course of action, he heard a shriek.

"*Ya*, Ben-Aïssa, look there! . . . Take him, Inshallah! Take him!"

Half a dozen horsemen were climbing the bank. D'Ornano heard a shot. Other horsemen appeared. Again he heard Djeïlma's voice.

"Who was shot, Mustapha? . . . Khadour! . . . Then I care not. But see that Sidi Leïtoun is not hurt!"

She added immediately:

"Leave the Frenchwoman alone! She cannot escape without help, and I would be there when she is captured. Tell the men to scatter and we will get them all. Sidi-Malik, Anoun-Dialo and Sidi d'Ornano did not come back."

The Corsican did not wait to hear more. Gisèle was alone, in more urgent danger than Leyton. Indeed, the artist seemed to have fallen into excellent hands. D'Ornano faced about, crawled under a bush, jumped a wall and ran for the caravan.

He found Gisèle alone and thoroughly frightened. For half an hour she had been intently listening to all the whispers of silence, anxiously waiting to hear the foot-

steps of her cousin. The moon was up. The caravan bathed in its frigid beams. The shadow of the bordj had receded as the satellite shot upwards in the turquoise of a pale sky.

This bordj was the threat hanging over the desert and hushing all noises into silence. Above it the cupola of Sidi-Ziggurt's kuba glimmered like molten silver. Bou-Amel, barefoot, his white gandourah studded with knives, was praying there, kneeling for inspiration over the onyx tombstone of his formidable great-grandfather. The distant chirruping of a fife spanned the distance. The single note of a love-sick toad, repeated at intervals, served only to emphasize the silence, the immutable stillness of sands and sky. The waves of evercoming darkness, blue transparencies of enormous depth rolled by, awaiting the prey the oasis would send to the desert. This silken veil hanging outside, this net spread around Igli like a spider's web, was more dreadful in its stillness than black waters. Gisèle felt that she was at sea, becalmed, but aware that the storm was gathering. The whole world was now that lighted cliff, a slumbering village grimly attempting to keep its hold on the crevices of a bleak wall, a few palms of a silvery gray that not even a breath of air disturbed, and a cock-eyed Chinese moon, pasted on a turquoise mantle—only that and a mist of settling dust. Such was her feeling of anxiousness that the unheralded reappearance of d'Ornano drew from her a nervous scream of terror.

"Who is this?" she exclaimed. "You, Monsieur d'Ornano! . . . What has happened? Where is George? What was that shot?"

The Corsican was already busy untying the camels. He stated briefly that Leyton was a prisoner, and that they must prepare for immediate flight. His disinclination to enter into any further explanation at this time was so obvious that questions died on her lips. She entered the *bassour*. He made the animal get up.

They had just started when they heard the noise of hoofs. D'Ornano turned his head just in time to see Anoun-Dialo emerge from the bushes, swerving sharply to the left to avoid the blow aimed by a horseman. He heard the negro yell:

"Shoot, Sidi! Shoot!"

But there was no need for shooting. Realizing that help would come too late, Anoun-Dialo had checked his momentum so abruptly that it was the fist of the horseman instead of the blade which descended on his shoulder. There was an attempt on the negro's part to catch the horse's leg. In a flash the horseman was in the dust, with the animal on top.

D'Ornano, who heard distinctly a cracking of bones, was struck dumb by so extraordinary an instance of power. The Senegalese caught Sidi-Malik's *mehari* by the nose-ring. Smiling beatifically, he raised himself to the saddle.

"I stronger than horse, *Akh Arbi!*" he declared. "But him son of a Jew is followed by other dogs. Let us go *fissa bezef.*"

"Go where?" d'Ornano inquired. "We must wait for Sidi-Malik. Where didst thou leave him?"

Anoun-Dialo shrugged his shoulders.

"By this time him pretty near as good as dead, *Bismillah!*" he answered. "The Ouled-Ougouni catch him."

Him now going to Bou-Amel, who pretty soon salts his hands or cuts his throat." His sigh corrected the irreverence of a hideous gesture. "Or perchance he escapes, who knows? Him very tricky, Sidi. He says, 'Anoun, go to Sidi d'Ornano *fissa fissa, Jehanum ke marfik*. Tell him go to Figuig. Then he send the Ouled-Sidi-Sheikhs of Si-Hamza to buy me back."

At the second part of Sidi-Malik's message d'Ornano gave vent to a sigh of relief. He had felt all the misery of the man wedged between contrary duties. The thought of abandoning Leyton and Sidi-Malik to their fate was unpalatable in the extreme. And yet he was powerless to help them. An immediate attempt to effect their rescue might involve, besides his own capture, that of Mlle. de Diôlie and of important papers. It might mean the confiscation of Sidi-Malik's wealth, the sole means to secure the freedom of its owner. It were better to make straight for Figuig and open negotiations through the mediation of native chiefs.

Djeilma's intentions were plain to him. She would join the crowd of women following the harka of Bou-Amel. If Leyton ran a risk in her company, it was not that of his life, assuredly. She could be trusted to do all in her power to protect him. There was no question that, in so far as the American was concerned, the Ouled-Ougouni would defer to her wishes, at least temporarily; and Leyton, good fellow at all times, had a knack of his own for making friends. But it was to be feared that things would go harder with Sidi-Malik. Through Djeilma, who had no reason for sparing him, Bou-Amel was sure to learn of the presence in Igli of the scout who had been instrumen-

tal in leading d'Ornano's column back to the coast. The Circassian would not omit to say that he was a spy sent by the French to ascertain the strength of the Saharan contingents. She knew that Sidi-Malik had been connected with the attempt to kidnap Abd-er-Rhaman, and she possessed information of a nature to convict him of having betrayed the secrecy of Senussi meetings. Furthermore, she could accuse him of the crime of having enriched himself with the spoils of Marakesh without paying the fifth due the Sultan on all plunder.

The certainty that he could make no immediate attempt to save the camel-driver from being handed over to the chaouch served only to strengthen d'Ornano's determination to move forward at top speed. Cupidity and the desire for revenge would urge Bou-Amel to put on his trail a body of mehari riders. Not a moment was to be lost; and since the scarcity of water, in the regions they were to cross, and the long distances between wells, rendered a swerving from the beaten track so dangerous an adventure as to be altogether out of the question, swiftness had become their only hope of escape.

In Figuig he would intrust to his friend Si-Hamza, a schoolmate of Algiers' Lycee and of Saint-Cyr's Military Academy, who, by the recent death of his father, had become chieftain of the powerful tribe of the Ouled-Sidi-Sheiks, the business of negotiating Leyton's and Sidi-Malik's ransom. The course of action suggested by the camel-driver was by far the best. There was, it is true, a possibility that intervention would come too late; but an immediate attempt carried with it so little probability of success that the trial would merely be foolhardiness.



Moreover, there were other interests to safeguard. He could not put in jeopardy the life and honor of Gisèle, nor overlook the fact that, so long as General de Diolie's papers were in his possession, he was a soldier under orders.

That night and the whole of the next day the caravan succeeded in covering sixty-five miles. This accomplished, they had to stop. Although the pack-camels were travelling light, sixty-five miles in twenty hours was as much as could be expected from their endurance. Human beings were as tired as the beasts. Although, at Anoun-Dialo's suggestion, d'Ornano had put on two belts, one tight around the loins, the other tighter around the thorax, immediately below the armpits, he felt as if every bone in his body was broken and as if at each jolt of the mehari his spine was penetrating his skull. Considering the condition in which he, a man accustomed to hardships, found himself, he dreaded to think of Gisèle. The young woman was assisted out of the bassour complaining of a rending headache and of acute sea-sickness. The Corsican did not even attempt to comfort her. This was a case when they had to choose between flight and slavery, between fatigue and the ugliest of torments; perhaps between life and death. They would now rest six hours and resume their flight. In another twenty-four hours they might perhaps see their way to slacken their speed. Meanwhile they were to look upon suffering and weariness as upon necessary evils.

Anoun-Dialo, hardened to the mehari's motion to the extent of being able to sleep in the saddle, was willing to assume the task of keeping watch for the night. D'Ornano

was thus enabled to sleep the full six hours. Nevertheless, when, at two o'clock in the morning, the negro came to tell him that the mehara were loaded and that everything was ready for departure, he felt so imperfectly rested that it was with an effort he summoned the courage to stand and try the strength of his weary limbs. Once in the saddle, however, he soon recovered his customary suppleness. The keen atmosphere of the small hours braced him. It was freezing cold, the temperature having fallen below 28° F. But, some six hours later, he noticed that it was already 105° in the shade; and the prospect of a further climb of 20° before noon was one well calculated to throw him into despair.

Travelling between eleven and three o'clock had never been compulsory before; and he soon came to regard the suffering born of the mid-day heat as positively excruciating. Before noon, however, he sank into a sort of lethargy from which he derived some alleviation of misery. He was becoming accustomed to the fearful pace, and he vaguely understood that in another day or so he would be able to sleep in the saddle. Gradually he sank into deeper slumber. He had lost all notion of time and location, when he suddenly felt that his camel stopped and sank to its knees.

The jolt awoke him. To his intense surprise, he saw that not only the whole caravan had stopped, but that Anoun-Dialo was already busily engaged in a familiar operation. He rummaged through the load of one of the camels and took from it the tent stakes. Forcing the animals to lie on their sides, he bound them in such a position that they could not stir. Then he gagged them

securely. All this was accomplished by the negro with such speed that d'Ornano saw him turn his attention to his rifle before he had himself fully recovered from his astonishment.

But the sight of the negro looking into the magazine of his gun completely awoke the Corsican. Sure now that there was danger ahead, he seized his own weapons and proceeded to verify their contents. He joined Anoun-Dialo just as Gisèle, who had managed to crawl out of the bassour, whose curtains had been tied together on the outside, stood erect.

He promptly motioned her to lie flat. The halt had been made in a gully. From the bottom of this hole they could see scarcely a hundred feet ahead, but a better place of concealment it would have been difficult to find. In a flash, d'Ornano understood the situation. They were not pursued—concealment would then have been useless, since they could not obliterate the tracks left by the camels—but the animals had been gagged to secure silence. Evidently, to the north of them, some caravan bound for Tafielt was passing.

In the wake of Anoun-Dialo, he crawled slowly to the top of an eminence. In two minutes he reached a spot from which he could get a good view of the surrounding stretch of country. A little to the right he then perceived a cloud of dust.

For nearly two hours they remained quiet. The caravan approached slowly and passed them. It was not a convoy of traders, a column of soldiers or even a migrating tribe. They were smuggling Chambaa escorting into Morocco a consignment of contraband weapons landed in Tripoli by

a German firm which chose to deliver by this risky route rather than run the gauntlet of the French cruisers.

These Chambaa were dangerous for several reasons. The very nature of the business they were engaged upon rendered them intensely suspicious. They were French subjects and knew only too well what it meant to have their movements reported to the Bureau Arabe. Moreover, they were now crossing, just before entering Morocco, the territory of the Ouled-Sidi-Sheiks, their deadly foes. In war or peace, no matter if the Frenchman reigned supreme or if both tribes followed Abd-er-Rhaman, a Chambi head would be both joy and pride for an Ouled-Sidi-Sheikh. The difficulty of the smugglers' present position more than warranted d'Ornano's belief that if his own party was discovered, nothing would remain to tell the story of Chambi treachery and cold-blooded murder. He had heard tales of travellers who, meeting through bad luck with a Chambi caravan, had accepted their hospitality. In each case the Chambi had betrayed the guest, a crime almost unheard of in other parts of the Sahara. Men had been disembowelled, tied to stakes and left to die simply because they had seen too much. He knew that these smugglers were fiends of the worst species, arch-traitors who come with a smile and with hands upheld for the purpose of knifing a man as soon as he lowers his gun. With Arabs like these, the best policy was to shoot at sight. He instantly resolved upon his course. If they were discovered he would shoot as many men as he had bullets in the magazine of his rifle, then turn his revolver against Gisèle and himself. Fortunately, the necessity for carrying out this resolution did not arise. The wind was blowing from

the north. Their own beasts were gagged and helpless, and the pack-animals of the smugglers could not smell other camels and arouse suspicion by neighing. The Chambaa at last disappeared and Anoun-Dialo stood up.

When d'Ornano followed his example, he noticed that the giant, his enormous palm protecting his eyes, was intently looking, not towards the caravan, but towards a point apparently further south. He looked also, but in vain. The glare of the sunlit waste was scarcely bearable. This tremendous light had, moreover, greatly impaired his sight in the course of the past month. His eyes, larger than those of the Saharans, lacked the protection afforded by the shaggy eyebrows and the long lashes which are such distinctive features of the dwellers of the sands. Congestion of the blood vessels had been followed by inflammation, and ophthalmia, the commonest of Saharan diseases, threatened him. He saw nothing; but he heard Anoun-Dialo exclaim sharply that pursuers were in sight.

"Who are they?" he inquired.

"The veiled people of the lance, Bismillah! Aït-Litzam!"

CHAPTER XV

THE VEILED PEOPLE OF THE LANCE

The Forsaken of God! The Corsican bit his lip. This was the foe he had so often met and defeated on his return journey from Ouadaï. Anoun-Dialo had been a prisoner of the Tuaregg; he had fought them in several encounters, and he could be trusted not to mistake them for Trarza, Tibbus, Chambaa or Ouled-Sidi-Sheiks. With a long-winded curse which consigned to destruction Bou-Amel, Abd-er-Rhaman, Ben-Aïssa and an incredible number of females, Djeïlma not excepted, the Senegalese explained that their tracks would soon be discovered. The Tuaregg would learn from the Chambaa that they had not seen the fugitives and would conclude that the prey was not far off. D'Ornano ordered an immediate departure. They had still four hours of light before sundown. This was enough to ascertain who would win in a speed contest.

It was scarcely probable that the Tuaregg had seen them, concealed as they were in this gully. The path they were now to follow wound its way through a dry valley where turns were so numerous that for a long time yet they would be able to keep out of sight. They were again about to leave the sand-dunes of the Erg for the stony table-land of the Hamadan, making, as straight as the ground permitted, for the lone well of Zushir-Meg. But the Tuaregg, if not already on their tracks, would surely come across them

before reaching the caravan of the smugglers. They would apply to them for information and would learn that the fugitives had not been met up to the time the Chambaa had left the defile leading to the well. The only hope of escape arose from the excellent condition of the camels. They had not travelled as fast as those of the foe and had just been granted a rest of two hours. Still, mehara that could cover the distance now separating the fugitives from Igli in so short a time must of necessity be animals of the finest breed. The Tuaregg would win, unless d'Ornano proved the better pilot and saw his way to profit by the night's darkness to outwit the leader of the pursuing column. This leader was evidently an Arab of some sort; at the worst a Berber camel-driver. In this part of the Sahara the Tuaregg were in foreign land, and were bound to rely on the topographical knowledge of outsiders. If this guide came from Tafielt, the Corsican, who knew every inch of ground between Igli and Figuig, might win. But if he turned out to be an Ouled-Sidi-Sheikh, a Chambi or an Ouled-Ougouni, they were lost.

It was not until sunset that he was compelled to acknowledge defeat. Vainly, by using short cuts, he attempted to increase the distance separating his friends and himself from the pursuers. The Tuaregg followed without a fault, gaining little, it is true, but furnishing ample evidence that their mehara were flawless animals. Nothing short of a simoom could now give the fugitives a chance of escape. Indeed, Anoun-Dialo had detected, in the extraordinary rise of temperature between twelve and two o'clock, the forerunning signs of an approaching sand-storm. But the simoom might delay its coming for thirty-six hours; and

even if it came before, the remedy might prove worse than the evil. Gisèle's and d'Ornano's mehara were the only two that could keep up with this fearful pace. The other animals were tired and would stop of their own accord in five hours at the most. They might go on a little longer if they smelled water before that time; but then they were sure to overdrink.

Night fell. Gisèle was so stupefied with fatigue that she was not even aware of the danger in their rear. Between eight and nine o'clock Anoun-Dialo asked d'Ornano whether they were to surrender or fight. In any case they had to stop. The camel which carried the heaviest load was lame. The two animals that carried Sidi-Malik's fortune and the camping outfit were little better off. The Corsican replied that they would go on until all animals had fallen. Thereupon the negro bent sideways and, with a single stroke of his flissa, cut the throat of the straggler. The beast fell with a thump. They went on for another hour.

At the end of that time, Anoun-Dialo repeated the operation on two other pack-animals. Twenty minutes went by. Then the mehari which carried Sidi-Malik's property fell. The sacrifice of the baggage had divided the foe. No more than fifteen men now pursued them. But these possessed the best mehara; and the distance separating the two troops had considerably decreased. Gisèle's and Anoun-Dialo's camels were in a pitiable condition. Both were ceaselessly grunting and attempting to bite, sure signs that the time was now near when they would refuse service altogether. Suddenly, as they were climbing a steep slope, Anoun-Dialo's beast stumbled and fell.

When a camel slips he sprains his muscles and is done

for. D'Ornano instantly slowed down. He heard Anoun-Dialo call out:

"Go, Sidi! Only thou and the woman can escape. With Allah's help, Anoun-Dialo stop three Aït-Litzam. Maybe more. I shall kill camels. . . . Go with Allah! Mehara soon smell water and go *fissa bezef*."

"And what will be thy fate if thou art delivered to Bou-Amel?" asked the Corsican.

"Hands in the salt, like Sidi-Malik," came the reply. "Anoun-Dialo betrayed Senussiya, remember."

D'Ornano shivered. Moghrabi justice is summary and retributive. He knew that the thief loses his hands, the calumniator and false witness his tongue, the runaway wife has her tibias broken with clubs, the sacrilegious, rebel or apostate suffer the punishment of salt and die a horrible death. He hesitated. Anoun-Dialo called again.

"Go, Sidi. Thou knowest desert best. Send the Ouled-Sidi-Sheiks of Si-Hamza."

D'Ornano stimulated his mehari. Turning in the saddle, he saw the giant attempt, without success, to make his animal rise. Then darkness came between them. Two minutes later he heard a shot.

He turned again, just in time to catch another flash from the rifle. Anoun-Dialo fired a third time. Then all was still.

They went on for ten minutes more. Gisèle's camel sank to his knees.

This was the last blow. D'Ornano shrugged his shoulders ready to give up the fight. He knew very well that if he allowed his own mehari a rest at this stage, the animal would lie down never to rise again. He stopped, neverthe-

less, grasped his rifle, dismounted and ran to his companion. The young woman was sleeping.

A moment the Corsican remained bent over her, holding with both hands the curtains of the bassour. She had slept several hours, perhaps, and so soundly that she had not heard the shots of Anoun-Dialo, had not even felt that her camel was stopping. He reflected that it had better be so. To the end she would remain unaware that she had come to the dark gate. Slowly, but deliberately, the Corsican drew his revolver and cocked it.

And still she slept, her head reposing on her extended arm, her face half hidden in the rebellious curls which the scarlet lips blew aside at each expiration of her regular breathing. She had discarded the veil and lay in the native garb, bare-armed and barefoot, tiny silver m'saïs encircling her ankles, sculptural in the tight-fitting bolero of scarlet and the Turkish shintiyan of green silk.

Had she been mere marble there is no question that the Corsican would have smashed without a tremor the work of a Praxiteles. She lived, and despite the lack of imagination that made him a man of action, he pictured clearly to himself the stream of blood flowing from those temples, the wild look of animal death in the instantly revulsed eyes, the convulsive gaping of this throat whose cream was now dyed with a velvety pink flush.

And yet they could not stay here. The revolver went back to his belt and he turned on his heel, his glance lost among the stars. Outside, nature was indifferent and splendid. He reflected that life is cheap and that the spark he had not the courage to extinguish would soon flicker and vanish. And this was all he could call friendly under

the enormous sky! When this would cease to be he would be truly alone. Alone for only a second, perhaps; but he would sink into the void filled with the horror of his loneliness, haunted by the flight of this little soul across the ether.

He frowned and turned again, shorn of his power to strike, choking in the vice-like grip of a pity stronger than himself. The young woman had moved. The thought that she would resent this intrusion on her sleep caused the miracle to happen. A quickened movement of the heart sent the blood beating against his temples. An animal instinct of ownership and protection folded his arms around the sleeping form. With the stride and the snarl of the gorilla Fremiet shows us kidnapping a woman, he carried her away, an unnamed feeling of triumph and brutality swelling his breast.

Willing or not, this woman was his and would remain his to the end, since death would immediately befall them. Now that he dared proclaim his ownership, he was almost glad that the end should come. He carried her to his own camel, not because this was in any way necessary, but because he was seeking an excuse for a movement which had been as irresistible as it was physical.

He laid her on the sand behind the camel. Then kneeling in the protection of the animal, he rested his rifle across its body. He had just completed his preparations when two silhouettes became visible, sharply delineated on a back-ground of indigo blue sprinkled with cold stars.

He fired twice. One of the silhouettes instantly collapsed and the other slid gently to the ground. In the distance he heard shouts.

Awakened by the reports, Gisèle half raised herself. She saw only one camel when there had been seven, one man when there had been two, and darkness where there had been daylight. The man was d'Ornano. He waited with ready rifle. An unspeakable awe filled her heart.

A third mehari rider appeared to the south. D'Ornano fired on him, obliterating him from the sky.

He became conscious that Gisèle was weeping. For a minute this pitiful, smothered sobbing of a child lost on a battle-field disturbed him.

The Tuaregg were longer in coming than he had expected. As five minutes, ten minutes passed by without bringing new developments, he inferred that they were engaged either in a discussion of the means to be employed in attempting his capture or had already decided to resort to stealth. They had evidently received orders to capture him alive, since no shot had come in answer to his firing, and he had heard Anoun-Dialo's rifle belch three times without echo on the foe's part. Trained to desert fighting, he surmised that the Tuaregg would attempt to approach him unaware and would do so crawling. A hope yet smouldering began to glow with greater brilliancy in the inner recesses of his brain. At this moment he heard a frightened voice, and a small hand rested on his shoulder.

"Where is Anoun-Dialo, Monsieur d'Ornano? Where are we? Are we going to die?"

The love of life, coming back with the new hope, impelled him to take her hand. She was kneeling at his side, shivering with cold, her large eyes almost luminous in the darkness.

"Listen," he said. There is still a way perhaps, one

very small chance. If it fails, you must resign yourself to the worst. Did I ever tell you that your father's orders were to shoot you rather than let you become a prisoner?"

"Yes," she said very low.

"The Tuaregg are crawling towards us. We may foil them by abandoning the camel and crawling ourselves to the south, describing a semicircle to avoid being met half-way. Then God help us! We may have to walk all the way to Figuig and we may have to die from thirst. Are you willing to risk it?"

In what obscure way she felt that the man who had carried her in his arms and had drunk deep of the abandon of her pose, prying into the secret of her sleep, was no longer the man who, not so long ago, reviled womankind with such genuine insolence, lies in woman's unaccountable instinct. It was in her flesh that she felt the tyranny of a will strange to herself and ignored half an hour ago; it was in her flesh that she was aware of the presence of a being whose apparition disturbed the symmetry of her well-ordained thoughts. For the first time it was given to her to understand the reason for the brutality of man. She had conceived the image and had been revolted by the hideousness of a creature a hundred thousand years old, who set his teeth, declared "this thing is mine," clubbed his mate into submission and set her digging for the roots he ate himself in sullen solitude. But it turned out that this being was perhaps not meant to be the Provider. He was the Protector who did the fighting when need arose. And in the face of this evocation from a blood-stained and tormented past, she had not a revolt of the spirit, only an overwhelming desire to buy protection from death at the

cost of corporeal surrender. Perhaps it was a plea for continued protection; perhaps a reward. She may have felt that this would be her last chance of acknowledging a debt. Perhaps the brutality of this nature impelled her to satisfy the fleeting desire of the hour. It may be that she had been brought to acknowledge her weakness in the midst of such a complex and powerful planetary world, and discovered that her love was her own only at the minute when it was vouchsafed to her, that this also was eminently perishable. The crisis which stiffens the male animal into an attitude of defence acts inversely on the inverse nature of his mate and draws forth all the tenderness of an organization threatened before the fulfilment of its natural mission. Love, the brother of death, does not embarrass itself with conventions when the imprescriptible instinct is threatened. What did it matter if d'Ornano had not spoken? The bond between them existed outside of mere words. She drew nearer and offered her lips.

It remained for him to prove that he was worthy of her trust. The cautious advance of the Tuaregg was so delayed that time was given them to clear the moving line of the prowlers. They did so by the narrowest margin, however. Two or three times d'Ornano had to turn on his back to get his bearings by the stars. His motion was seriously hampered by his rifle, and his hands had become numb at the contact of the ground. The stillness was absolute; the immensity of upper and lower regions terrifying. The silver nails of firmament added to the awfulness of Saharan silence the mystery of frigid spaces travelled over by a thousand suns.

It was luck that they were lying quiet, d'Ornano on his

back trying to locate the polar star with the help of the Great Bear, when the faint rustle of a snake-like motion made both of them shiver at the thought that some Aït-Litzam was slowly making for their forlorn camel. It was luck which brought them without a mishap, when chances were ten to one that they would lose themselves among the starlit rocks, to the mehara of the foe. And it was luck also, the greatest of all, which was responsible for the fact that only two men were watching over Anoun-Dialo and the camels.

There were eleven mehara there. No sooner had d'Ornano realized his good fortune than he pushed Gisèle forward at top speed, running himself as he had not run since the evening of his flight from the Kutubia. One of the guards he instantly shot down. The other took to his heels, fell, regained his feet and disappeared, leaving his rifle behind him. The Corsican liberated Anoun-Dialo. The giant was no sooner free from ties than he picked up the lance of the dead man and undertook a promiscuous slaughter of the mehara, sparing only two of them. These they mounted.

They were being shot at. The report of d'Ornano's rifle had been heard and the Tuaregg were coming back at a run. Again the fugitives described a semicircle, the Corsican being above all anxious to regain possession of his papers. As soon as these were secured, they resumed their journey towards the well. Gisèle was compelled to ride astride behind the Captain; but what could not be helped must be endured. They had no time to lose; and the spent camel, by refusing to rise, prevented them from transferring the bassour to one of the captured animals.

The outburst of yells which followed their start served only to accelerate their speed. The two mehara they had captured were fast and progressed with a wonderfully smooth motion. But they were the wildest they had yet seen, and the utmost vigilance was required to repel the oft-repeated attacks of the serpentine necks. This d'Ornano did with the lance of the dead Aït-Litzam, and the Senegalese with a knife held between his prehensile toes. As soon as he judged that they were out of range, the Captain, who had kept away from Anoun-Dialo to divide fire and offer a smaller mark, came alongside. He found the giant laughing aloud, as only negroes, children and hysterical women can laugh, his whole frame convulsed with mirth.

"*Ya illah, Sidi,*" he ejaculated. "Now the Forsaken of God they walk to the well and wait there for a caravan. Nothing to drink and the hot sands burn their feet. Either they starve or they eat the flesh of tired camels. The flesh no good, Sidi. *Macash bono!* It smells like musk turtle. . . . *Taieb kateer, Akh Arbi!*"

Undoubtedly, the image he had in mind of veiled figures, Aït-Litzam clad in blue tramping the hot sands, a lance in the right hand and a portion of camel on the shoulder, filled his black soul with the purest delight. He gloated over the fact that the sons of a thousand generations of donkeys, as he called them, had lost fifteen mehara, every one of which sold for the price of twelve Filali pack-camels. When assured by d'Ornano that this equalled one hundred and eighty pack-camels, he fairly gaped and declared that he felt himself avenged for having been sold into slavery by the Hoggars; a statement which led Gisèle to ask him

how many camels it would take to buy a king in his country, since one hundred and eighty of them represented the price of his eleventh son.

D'Ornano was silent, not so much because the arms of the young woman were folded around his waist as because his was decidedly a soul that did not admit of a state of thankfulness. They reached the well in five hours. The place was utterly forlorn and desolate. The moon, which had now been up three hours, dispensed its frigid rays to a lone kuba and to an irregular hole lined with huge porphyry stones. They found dates in the kuba, last remnants of provisions left there by a caravan mindful of the needs of brothers in distress. As they were without food, the find was exceedingly welcome. They allowed the camels a drink, and went to sleep.

Gisèle, too thinly clad, was glad to be muffled up for the night in d'Ornano's burnous. The Corsican was the last to awake; and when Anoun-Dialo came to call him, all was ready for an immediate start. A look at the sun convinced him that it was already late, and that departure could not be delayed an instant longer.

He noticed that the breeze had shifted from north-east to south. This foretold a simoom. In other circumstances he would have decided to await in the kuba the passing of the sand-storm; but this was out of the question, since the party of Tuaregg, hurrying forward to find shelter before the breaking of the storm, might be expected at any moment. He determined to risk the adventure. In the sand-dunes, where they ran the risk of being buried under the moving sands, this would have been folly pure and simple; but, on stony ground, they could hope to reach their

goal at the cost of some additional suffering. Here, at the extreme limit of northern Sahara, simooms never constituted a real danger to life. Figuig was now no more than eight hours' distant, their supply of water was ample, the mehara were rested and the track lay due north in the dry bed of a torrent. With due allowance for the sand-storm, they could hope to sight the oasis before dark.

As the Corsican explained shortly afterwards to Gisèle, the situation of the Tuaregg was much more precarious than their own. If they had awaited the coming of the men who had stopped to take possession of Sidi-Malik's baggage there would be three riders for each beast. In such conditions they were bound to stop at the well until word of their plight reached Bou-Amel. This would render possible a complete turning of the tables. If informed in time of the presence of Tuaregg so near Figuig, the general in command of the place would not fail to despatch against them the scouts of the camel corps. Sidi-Malik's property would be recaptured, and the law of the desert, "the raider shall be raided," would be fulfilled; another illustration of the proverb that there is no profit under the sun.

He had turned in the saddle, and it was with a smile that he reminded his companion of a sentence she had made her own, finding an innocent amusement in furnishing her with the opportunity of playing again with the foils of controversy. The artlessness of her attempts at grasping a word in full flight, like an acrobat a trapeze; and her triumph when she caught him red-handed after an attempt to steal the victory by introducing a sophism into the discussion, were to him a source of never-ending delight. He

had said "no profit under the sun." She took up the phrase:

"No profit? I am not so sure. There is a profit in life itself, and man is a born gambler. It is the sensation of winning and losing, not the gold which makes the game. Light is light only in so far as there are eyes to see; and vibration does not exist outside of a vibrator. Yourself, Monsieur d'Ornano, you live a life akin to that of these Tuaregg. I have been asking myself many a time the meaning of the gospel of action I heard you preach. I know now—it dawned upon me last night. You move not so much for the sake of disturbing the universe as to hear in yourself the echo of this disturbance. You are then primarily contemplative—as are we all. The difference between us is that I register whispers and you nothing but noises. Being strictly contemplative, I am well content to listen without a move to the voices of others. I take my sensation second hand. You strike the blow yourself."

"Then you believe that my sensation of last night was not worth your own? You were registering both whispers and noises, and I only noises?"

"It is hard to say. We are not pitched in the same key, that's all. When the sound becomes too shrill, the human ear ceases to perceive it. But I readily conceive an organ easily affected by shriller notes. Very likely some insects possess it. It follows that their conception of the universe is altogether different from our own. Supposing that they possess intellect in the same degree as we do, their philosophy and ours are still without a common basis. This amounts to saying that differences between individuals render souls impenetrable to each other. Last night you

were still cool and possessed when the thinking process had already been abolished in me. I had ceased to register; you were still registering. Consequently, I am unable to make even a guess at the nature of your sensations; the only thing clear to me is that you were thoroughly enjoying yourself. Reasoning by analogy, I surmise that the Tuaregg, foiled as they were, are at present experiencing sensations of the highest order. As their organization is eminently designed to stand this sort of excitement, they are putting by stores of experience. Experience, that is to say, the consciousness that at one time or other we have been truly alive, is wealth. Therefore it cannot be said that 'there is no profit under the sun.' Moreover, let me observe to you that Solomon was a Cartesian before Descartes. It was the discovery that nothing is profitable which convinced him of his wisdom; and he says himself that wisdom excelleth folly as much as light excelleth darkness. Now, if there is a profit in wisdom, the conclusion contradicts the premises. But the failing is common to all philosophers."

D'Ornano laughed. One of his pet theories was that philosophy was bankrupt.

"Well done!" he said. "I may be as obtuse as a fish and three-quarters blind; but all of the universe I care for is the image—distorted if you will—my imperfect organs enable me to receive. I enjoy myself as I am. May I ask you if you feel richer by the experience of last night?"

"It cannot be said, at any rate, that I have lost anything. What do you think?"

Her eyes were laughing in spite of herself. Apparently d'Ornano thought that if the mehari turned to bite he was

in need of a kick, for he gave all his attention to the animal. The necessity for stern repression did not explain why he flushed and kept looking straight ahead, a poor picture for a man who so thoroughly enjoyed himself. But Gisèle did not mind. She had long ago diagnosed his case as hopeless, and knew well that he would always miss the chance to make her a madrigal.

They travelled two hours. Then a cloud of dust arising in their rear warned them of the approach of the sand-storm. It was blazing hot. They were at the bottom of a gorge and the short gusts of wind seemed the very breath of a smelting furnace. Gisèle, bundled up in d'Ornano's burnous, the cowl of the garment pulled down on her eyes, was to some extent spared the burns of the blast; but the Corsican had no other recourse against the heat than the handkerchief he wetted constantly and applied on the nape of his neck. He felt sleepy, and this was a bad sign. His bare feet—the mehari will not stand the contact of shoes—were almost blistered. Had it not been that, to relieve suffering, he was constantly rubbing them against the fur of the camel, he would have fallen asleep. He straightened suddenly under the lash of a feeling of responsibility re-awakened by a shout of warning.

Anoun-Dialo was shaking him by the shoulder. They had reached a turn of the canyon. In front of them the gorge was filled with horsemen.

Wondering if he was not the victim of some hallucination, the Corsican rubbed his eyes. For the last few minutes he had been tormented by an obsession: the sight of native women filling their jars in a large stream which, he knew well, did not exist. He felt that his head was hot and



Then a sickening weakness stole over him



heavy, and wondered if it was still in a dream that he beheld a company of the Foreign Legion, his own corps.

He tried to speak and could not. Gisèle was also shaking him, trying to hold him up, with a frantic call for help. Anoun-Dialo lowered him to the ground. He stood there like a drunken man, scarcely aware that the negro deluged him under a flow of water. A lieutenant he knew vaguely had taken hold of his hand. Men were shouting around him in a pure delirium of delight. He thought it stupid to be vacillating there like a puppet, unable to utter a sound. Then he was made to lie down. Anoun-Dialo held his bare arm while the lieutenant bled him with his knife. He was on Gisèle's knees. The last he saw was her white face and her eyes, brightening as tears were ready to fall. Then a sickening weakness stole over him and he sank into an ocean of horrors.

CHAPTER XVI

THE FOURTH GALON

While Gisèle listened to every word, d'Ornano fought the imps of delirium.

The corpse-carriers ran so rapidly that horsemen, galloping on the flank of the column did not succeed in keeping abreast. The hoofs of the horses did not touch the ground. A blue smoke enshrouded the plain. Here and there flowers raised their moving stems above this stratum of vapor. A light wind fanned his face. He gave himself up with pleasure to this languor, this forgetfulness of opium.

The cortege reached a spot where black cypresses grew between white stones. The procession continued its fantastical run among graves. All these tombstones were raising themselves. A thick black smoke issued from each vault. Slowly it resolved itself into human forms, and these phantoms made signs to him to join them.

The carriers stopped suddenly, tied his big toes together and lowered him into a circular well.

On top of him they lowered a basket filled with figs, honey-combs, olives and dates. Then they left him. He saw that a stone blocked the mouth of the pit and that he was left in complete darkness. He heard somebody call him by name, and recognized the voice of Sidi-Malik.

The camel-driver took him by the hair and released him from the shroud. They went straight up. The earth became a mere point in the heavens. They saw millions of stars.

But his companion suddenly melted, and he continued alone his course through frigid spaces. He was conscious of a rapid gravitation around some planet. All at once he discovered that he was falling headlong upon some world afire.

The speed of his fall became terrific. The displacement of air prevented him from breathing. Star powder, gritty as sand, filled his ears and his nostrils. Out of a sky ablaze with heat, he shot like an arrow into some icy fluid where his momentum gradually decreased. He had fallen into a deep sea. Around him the waters were alive with battling monsters. He kicked and went up. When he reached the surface he saw that he was afloat on the ghastly waters of an ocean without a sun.

Cold rain was falling on his shoulders. The surf jostled him towards some bleak and steep shore. He reached the beach and noticed that the sand under him was of jade and silver. He sat down in the midst of green beings with incandescent sapphire eyes which reminded him of frogs. They were weeping. They all pointed, between the sea and the low sky, to a black smoke. It was the simoom. He felt as if a torrent of sand was pouring down upon him.

Somebody gave him a drink and wiped away the powder which covered his face. He recognized Gisèle. She took him by the hand, her forefinger pressing his wrist. A long time they walked through the sand-storm, finally reaching

a gorge between high mountains whose summits were lost in the fog. At dusk they came upon a deserted temple. Aloes and cacti grew between disjointed stones, and the moat was filled with the bodies of slain Aït-Litzam. Although two leopards defended the gate, Gisèle passed unharmed between them. Beyond was a semi-darkness imprisoned between walls of onyx and heavy Egyptian columns. She called to him to follow. They came upon a large gong of red copper.

"Listen," she said. "This is the temple the Sabatheans erected to the God Silence. Solomon hung this gong between the columns, and it is the largest in the whole world. Listen!"

She struck, and a fearsome shiver of metal rolled like waves through the empty hall. Then he saw that a demon was seated on a throne of ebony at the head of a flight of marble steps. At his left came a slow procession of women; at his right a throng of armed conquerors.

Among the women he recognized the Queen of Sheba, Thaïs, Salomé, Zenobia and Inez de Castro; among the men Hannibal, Khaleb, Timour, Khaïr-ed-Din-Barbarossa and the Cid Campeador. And behold! the demon having asked: "Who are you all?" all were too proud to answer. When he said, "What have you done?" they all gave him a disdainful look. But when he asked: "What do you want?" they all replied, "Décide between us."

But the demon laughed and said: "You are but a name and a handful of ashes, nothing but a taste of bitter death. Get you back to Plutonian darkness. There is but one mortal greater than all the gods."

They all asked who that mortal was, but the demon

fanned the night with vampire winds. There was a whirlwind of ashes and another gust of simoom. They found themselves on the sea-shore. With her forefinger, Gisèle wrote on the sand; but there was no meaning to the sentence. When he turned to follow he heard her mocking laugh, and saw that she had taken the arm of a stranger.

While simoom and fever lasted, d'Ornano had many another nightmare. He so often uttered the name of Leyton that Gisèle was gradually led to believe that his friendship for the painter did not exclude a large percentage of jealousy, a discovery not calculated to displease her. Towards the middle of the night the wind abated and he fell into deep slumber. He awoke towards eight o'clock next morning, none the worse for his sunstroke, but a little weak and unable to account for the fact that a canvas of unmistakable military pattern had been pitched over his head and that the water-bottle hanging from the tent-pole was clothed in blue worsted and bore the matricule No. 2354.

He was in a bed; a bed of a kind, since it consisted solely of a mattress of inflated rubber. At his right he saw an officer's canteen bearing the label: Lieutenant Capo di Borgo—1^{er} *Etranger*.

He smiled: Capo di Borgo. . . . The name was more than Corsican, it was familiar. He remembered the face seen the day before. Two years ago it belonged to a sergeant of his acquaintance. There were other faces, too, which he thought he recollected. And all at once, unable to resist the temptation to go and shake a few hands, he tumbled out of bed, dressed hastily and drew the curtain.

He discovered with some surprise that the column no longer occupied the ravine. But a man was there, sitting in full sun, who took sand by the handfuls, wetted it and used it to polish a bit, a pair of stirrups and a scabbard. Convinced, evidently, that the efficiency of a troop wholly depends upon the care bestowed on military hardware, the private blew from time to time on the metal and then wiped it with a piece of woollen. When he heard d'Ornano's footsteps, he hastily got up, came to attention and saluted.

"Oh, is that you, O'Hara?" exclaimed the Corsican. "And where do you come from, if I may ask? Last time I heard of you, you were again a deserter."

The Irishman grinned, wiped his fingers on his trousers and took the hand that was offered him.

"We all desert," he answered in a French that was not free from Irish brogue. "But we all come back in God's due time. I got sixty days in jail and five in the *silo** for desertion. But the spree was worth it."

He winked and asked:

"How do you be feeling, sir?"

"As fine as a sunstruck man can expect, O'Hara. But where is Lieutenant di Borgo? Where is the young lady who came with me yesterday?"

"Asleep in the other tent, sir. She sat by your bed half the night. Lieutenant Capo went after them Tuaregg of yours. We have been expecting him for an hour or the like. All as is left here is me, that nigger of yours, Weinschwurtz and an American man."

* The *silo* or *matmorah* is a hole dug in dry ground and used as a granary by the natives.

"Weinshwurtz! Is Weinshwurtz back again? I thought he, too, was a deserter?"

"So he was, sir. So he was. Them Germans, like as not, go back home once in a while. But we get them all back, and more. You wait, sir, and see them recruits. We have Vouravief, who blew up a whole police patrol in Cronstadt. We have Pobadjeski, who deserted from the German Army with arms, horse and baggage. He drank the horse, blight his eyes, and came to us so broke that the first thing he did was to borrow my pipe and my tobacco and my matches. Then there is that American man. A sailor he used to be. Came here nobody knows why, unless it be he got drunk in Algiers, ran against some Kabyles and enjoyed the fight. We have a Boer, Van Bomsen, and an Englishman, Thomlinson. You will be after enjoying these two, sir. My pal, Larry, and myself have them two for bulldogs. Saving your presence, when a man is crazy he comes here; when he gets drunk he goes away; and we sees him again as soon as he comes back to his senses. Good men, all. And mighty thankful me and you is going to see trouble together."

He called to Weinshwurtz and to the American—Kelly by name—who were busy currying the horses. D'Ornano shook hands with both men. But at the first words his attention was called away. Capo di Borgo and the column were coming back.

"Damme if them Tuaregg have not all been pinched in this simoom like tobacco in a snuffbox," commented O'Hara. Then turning to the American: "Ever seen them Indians from this here country, Kelly, me man?"

He followed d'Ornano, his grin denoting that he was in

for his full share of the ovation that greeted the appearance of the Captain. The Corsican proceeded at once to review the prisoners. They were seventeen. Part of Sidi-Malik's property had been recovered and six camels had been captured. When, among the raiders, he recognized Mustapha, son of Sheikh Muhamed, he exclaimed:

"So thou wast the guide, after all! If ever beni-kelb was welcome, thou art the man. O'Hara, fetch me Anoun-Dialo!"

The negro came running a minute later.

"Pick out the best mehari in the lot, and find out which man is most likely to find his way back to Igli," d'Ornano ordered. "No, not Mustapha. He stays here as a hostage. Get me somebody else!"

The negro began to ask questions in unintelligible Tamazigh. Soon he pointed to a man and a camel.

"Tell him that he is free to go back," d'Ornano resumed. "Explain to him that he must go to Sheikh Muhamed and warn him that Mustapha's life answers for the life of Sidi-Malik and Sidi Leitoun. The lives of the other Tuaregg will answer for the delivery of his message. I must have an answer within five days. See to it that he is provided with food and water."

Anoun-Dialo handed the Targui a basket of dates and two goat-skins. He declared that all was ready.

"Then let go!" ordered the Corsican. "And tell him to remember me to Bou-Amel."

A mad outburst of yells and whistles greeted the start of the mehari rider. D'Ornano turned towards his countryman.

"This fellow might fall in with some Chambaa and come

back in force," he said. "Is there any reason why we should not leave at once for Figuig?"

"None whatever. I was sent here to ascertain the movements of Bou-Amel, and I find that you are better posted than I would be if I waited here a week. Moreover, my duty is to furnish you with an escort. I understand that you were intrusted with important papers."

"Who told you that?" asked d'Ornano, smiling.

"Mlle. de Diolie, of course," the Lieutenant replied. "You cannot request the doctor not to chatter with the nurse, you know. But, to come back to business, if your papers are to be forwarded to the General Staff and Mlle. de Diolie sent to the coast, you had better hurry up."

"Then we are threatened also from the north?"

"We are threatened from everywhere. You know where Bou-Amel is better than I. But Abd-er-Rhaman has left Taza and the Ouled-Sidi-Sheiks are restless. General Pluvigné fears that, with all his desire to remain our friend, Si-Hamza won't be able to restrain them. It stands to reason that a march to the sea cannot be undertaken before the defences of Figuig are swept clean. The Ouled-Sidi-Sheiks first care will be to fall upon the railroad and demolish the tracks."

"And trains won't be running below Khreider. I see. Kindly give orders for an immediate start."

He told Anoun-Dialo to fetch Gisèle's bassour, which had been brought in with the recaptured baggage, and fulfilled O'Hara's ambitions by requesting him to lend him his horse and to take personal charge of Mustapha. The Irishman called his friend Larry, and instructed him to go and request the presence of Capo di Borgo, his

own duties as a keeper of hostages preventing him from going himself in search of his superior.

When the Lieutenant rode alongside O'Hara took a twist of chewing tobacco out of his pocket, held it tight between two fingers and allowed Larry to take a bite.

"The tip of the morning to you, sir," he began. "Any objection to let Larry ride forward to Figuig?"

"To what purpose?" asked the Lieutenant.

"Purpose enough, sir, seeing that Captain d'Ornano has been given up for dead, and none of his fellow-officers won't be told of his coming in time to greet him and cheer him for what he's done. Give him a receptive punch, sez I."

Capo di Borgo reddened. Like all Corsicans, he was of facile enthusiasm. He reflected that part of the adulation bestowed upon d'Ornano would revert to the island of their birth and therefore to himself.

"Larry can go," he said. "He will see first the Secretary of the Cercle Militaire."

"And then every man, woman and child he meets on the way," added O'Hara.

Capo di Borgo was writing. He tore a page from his note-book.

"Go to General Pluvigné with this," he said. "The General must be told that the Captain comes with important papers."

Meantime d'Ornano had gone to inform Gisèle of Mustapha's capture. When the column began to move he remained behind her bassour. At one o'clock they came in sight of Beni-Ounif, at the entrance of the gorge known as the Wad-el-Haluf.

The troops stationed in Beni-Ounif—a battalion of Sudanese Tirailleurs—had been sent to patrol the railroad in the direction of Colomb-Bechar. But their wives and children had been left at home. As everybody sat at lunch, negresses made their appearance in the camp, bringing the *mouna* of eggs, chickens and palm wine. The wife of a quartermaster sergeant, wearing the madras and cotton dress distinctive of a *signare*, was leading them. It fell to Anoun-Dialo, who alone understood the Yolof and Serrer dialects, to act as interpreter. She made obeisance to d'Ornano, throwing at his feet a chicken whose throat she had just cut, and she placed his hand on top of her head. Incidentally, her hair contained fully half a pound of rancid butter. Gisèle was unable to repress her mirth when she saw the Corsican look at his palm, and, behind his back, to avoid offending the *signare*, wipe it on his burnous. Eggs, chickens and palm wine were accepted and thanks returned. But the end had not yet come. The *signare* began a speech, extremely eulogistic, judging by her gestures, and another woman took her place as soon as she showed signs of weakening. D'Ornano was hungry and little relished the joke. Gisèle came to his relief, pointing out that it was not at all necessary for him to stand. Anoun-Dialo would be delighted to relate to the admiring females the incidents of their voyage. This the negro did to everybody's satisfaction, especially to his own; and the shifting of interest came soon to betray the fact that the exploits of d'Ornano had fallen to the rank of mere incidents.

But all glory is dearly bought. A keen observer of human nature, private O'Hara, by name, made it a duty

and a pleasure to distribute among his friends all the delicacies he could not eat himself. As he found palm wine especially suited to cure his various stomach complaints, it came to pass that Anoun-Dialo beheld empty jars at the very time the hapless Mustapha began to experience the jocosity of an Irishman after drink.

In Tarla, three kilometres north of Beni-Ounif, d'Ornano had to submit to an ovation of another kind. The flag of the fort went up and down three times in succession. Five minutes later the Corsican caught sight of Colonial Infantry crowning the top of the adobe wall surrounding the palm gardens. These men jumped from their position and came to mingle with the Legionaries. An ear splitting din followed. Despite the heat, there were many more kepis in the blue that filtered between palms than on the heads of their owners. For two minutes d'Ornano was kept busy shaking hands. He was rescued by an officer, who ordered the men back.

"Captain d'Ornano?" inquired the newcomer.

"Myself."

"Glad of the opportunity to welcome you to Figuig. I am Captain Jarchin, in command of these men, and, for the time being, stationed in the fort above us. General Pluvigné just telephoned. He awaits your coming at the Cercle Militaire, and you are to take your papers with you. Can one of your men lend me a horse? I am the only mounted man in my company, and horses are of little use up there."

D'Ornano sought Capo di Borgo in the crowd.

"Capo," he ordered with a sternness belied by his smile, "get down at once! Devil take me if I am not

going to ride your horse to death to repay you for this piece of treachery. Consider yourself under close arrest!"

"And devil take me if I am not going to take my medicine behind Mlle. de Diolie's *bassour*," the young man replied, instantly leaving the saddle. "Anything to be rid of you. Good-by!"

D'Ornano and Jarchin were already galloping in the direction of Figuig. Here the canyon of the Wad-el-Haluf became so narrow that the opposite cliffs were not a stone's-throw from each other. In ten minutes they came in sight of the palms. The oasis and its ten villages lay at the bottom of a depression which had once contained a lake. Surrounded by mountains on every side, Figuig derived its water from a multitude of ravines furrowed on the steep slopes of the *djebel Zenaga* and *djebel Hamam*. Another quarter of an hour's ride across palm plantations brought the two officers to the villages. El-Maïz Inferior was the southernmost of these *ksour*. Abruptly, they found themselves at the entrance of a piazza.

Turcos in wide trousers of blue, their red fezzes thrown on their necks, were exercising with bayonets in the glare of the sunlit square. A crowd composed mostly of natives had gathered around them. The steel glittered and rattled as the troopers advanced by short leaps, catlike and treacherous, a cruel glimmer on their teeth. Officers of all arms,—Turcos, Zouaves, Spahis, Field and Mountain Artillery, Foreign Legion, Meharists, Bureau Arabe, Engineers and Chasseurs d'Afrique were idling on the four flanks of the company, so obviously attempting to kill time

that d'Ornano realized all at once the extent of the conspiracy against him. He had no sooner been sighted than a kaleidoscopic change came over the square. The natives were racing towards him; the Turcos ran towards the Cercle Militaire. Bareheaded, holding their kepis at the point of their swords, the officers were cheering. Presently they all turned and made their way towards the Cercle Militaire. To avoid running down the children, d'Ornano had been compelled to put his horse at a slower gait. Above the sea of shaven skulls he saw the company of Turcos line themselves against the wall. Two minutes passed. As he dismounted he heard a lieutenant command:

"Presentez . . . armes!"

The Turcos were proffering their weapons. They were not alone in rendering military honors. Without distinction of grades, officers of all arms had lined themselves on both sides of the stairway. There was no cheering this time. Held at arm's-length, sabres and swords crossed each other. This was the "vault of steel," and under it the Corsican must pass before entering the building. Very pale now, he brought his right hand to his forehead and began to ascend the stairs.

Up the steps General Pluvigné was waiting.

The two men kissed. This was the signal for a scene of abominable disorder. All blades were pushed back in the scabbards. While some men were shaking d'Ornano by the hand, others shook him by the head, all of them uttering animal cries. Finally a party of lieutenants caught the Corsican by the legs, lifted him on their shoulders and carried him around the reception-room. Mean-

time others sang, to the tune of "Marlborough," clapping their hands to mark time:

Il nous revient de guerre,
Mironton, mironton, mironlaire
Il nous revient de guerre
Sans chapeau ni souliers;
Mais couvert de lauriers;
Pour s'fair' porter en l'air-e,
Mironton, mironton, mironlaire,
Pour s'fair' porter en l'air-e,
Par quatre z'officiers.

General Pluvigné had to interfere to reestablish order. The victim of the ovation followed him into the next room. He formally delivered into the hands of his superior the papers he had come near losing in the tussle, and gave a brief account of his journey across the Adrar and Western Sahara, detailing with more particulars his visit to the camp of Bou-Amel. The General asked him to embody in a written report an approximate evaluation of the Saharan forces. Then d'Ornano broached the subject of Mlle. de Diolie. His chief interrupted him.

"I already know something of this part of your adventures," he said. "My arrangements have been made in consequence. As I have every reason to fear that a general uprising of the Ouled-Sidi-Sheiks will endanger our communications with the north within a week, an armored train carrying all papers of importance will leave to-night for the coast. Mlle. de Diolie will be sent to Mascara, or Oran, if she prefers. As soon as I can conveniently rescue you from the enthusiasm of your friends, I propose to go and congratulate her on her escape."

"And what do you intend to do with me?" asked the Corsican. "Are you also going to send me to headquarters?"

"Perhaps . . . unless you insist upon awaiting Bou-Amel here," smiled the General. "We shall speak of that later. Meanwhile we are to remember that your comrades are waiting. Have the kindness to press the electric button."

D'Ornano obeyed. An orderly appeared in the door.

"You can serve the punch," said the General. "It will induce these gentlemen to be patient a minute longer."

The punch was already steaming in glasses, and all had taken place around the table, when d'Ornano and the General made their appearance. A continuous fire of applause followed their progress across the room. It subsided as soon as General Pluvigné made a plea for silence. His glass raised, he began to speak:

"Gentlemen. After the spontaneous ovation you have just witnessed, it will hardly be necessary for me to introduce our guest. Captain d'Ornano is back. Of all who heard the news this afternoon, there is not, I suppose, a second lieutenant who has forgotten how, fifteen months ago, the column sent under Captains Monnier and Trafaëli, to make a general survey of the projected Saharan railroad, made on the stage of the world a startling reappearance. The two chiefs of the expedition had added their names to the already long list of Saharan martyrs. The column had been ambushed, attacked and nearly overwhelmed by Moslem hordes. The man who, not content to rally his companions under fire and to lead them back to the coast,

insisted that the French Army, and the nation behind it, should not be defeated in their purpose, stands at my right.

“To-day he comes back alone. Marakesh has fallen with all its defenders. I must do Captain d’Ornano the justice to say that he remained in the thick of the *mêlée* up to the eleventh hour. Heroism of the easier kind would have led him to await death in a futile attempt to stem the tide. He hearkened to the voice of the higher duty urging him to save at all cost documents of a nature to lighten the labor and cost of reconquest; and he gives us all the measure of his courage by daring to reappear among us a man who for once retreated before the Moslem.

“Perhaps we have forgotten the lessons of history. Defeated by Hannibal, a Roman consul dared, after Cannæ, reappear in the Senate to tell the tale of public disaster. The lesson of civic virtue given that day by the ‘*patres conscripti*’ of old Rome has no equivalent but the renunciation of Regulus. Varo was thanked by the leader of the Senate ‘for not having doubted of the Republic.’ In the name of the French Army, I now propose to thank Captain d’Ornano for not having doubted of his brothers.

“I take this opportunity to remind you that Figuig is threatened as Marakesh was threatened. It is the mission of the eight thousand troops garrisoning the oasis to prevent a junction of the Moslem forces. Figuig, ‘the thorn in the eye of Abd-er-Rhaman,’ must hold out long enough to enable the French armies to concentrate. In a week we shall see, surging at the foot of our defences, one hundred

and twenty thousand fanatics ready to die at a word of their religious chiefs.

"It is an open secret that only one of our bastions can be made impregnable. Two companies of the Foreign Legion and two sections of field and mountain artillery will, to-morrow, join in Tarla the company of Colonial Infantry now garrisoning the fort. But, as the strength of a fortress depends above all on the spirit of its chief, it is to Captain d'Ornano I intend to intrust the difficult task of holding against all comers the pass of the Wad-el-Haluf. You have already guessed that three companies and a battery cannot be given to a captain. Therefore, gentlemen, I bid you drink to the fourth *galon* of our new Major."

A thunder of applause followed the announcement. Sore hearts there were, to be sure, but none below and above the grade of captain, an excellent indication that d'Ornano's good fortune would soon be forgiven him by the others. Superseded as he was, Captain Jarchin was not among the envious. He was the first to extend his congratulations to his new chief.

General Pluvigné gave the Corsican ten minutes in which to thank his comrades for their welcome. Then he hurried him out. On the stairs they met Capo di Borgo. For all the haste he had made, the Lieutenant came just in time to see the curtain fall. D'Ornano accepted his congratulations and attempted to console him by telling him that there still remained some punch. They learned from him that Mlle. de Diolie had gone to the Catholic mission of the White Fathers of Figuig, in El-Hamam Superior.

Thither they went. A relation of their visit appears in

Gisèle's diary at the date of May 5th. The hand is scarcely legible, and tears seem to have fallen on the pages:

El-Hamam Superior, Figuig.—I hardly know where to begin. I go over the last pages of my diary with a strange feeling of disgust and lassitude. It seems to me that the person who wrote those lines has so completely ceased to be myself that I am almost tempted to smile as I realize how seldom in those pages I have attempted in earnest to see clearly into my heart. Alas! the only thing which is clear is that a girl is a creature of unconscious hypocrisy who, for fear of sinning against womanhood, will never dare tear off her own mask. If it was of any importance it would be pitiful to acknowledge that we are the victims of an ideal of modesty. But who cares? Nobody; not even myself.

For the first time in over a month I find myself in a room, a real room. There is only a bed, the table where I write, three chairs, a bronze crucifix on the wall and some religious books. But everything is beautifully clean, and my first hour in the mission was delightfully restful. My immediate care was for a much-needed change of costume. All I have, aside from the garments borrowed from Djellma, is the riding dress I wore on the afternoon of our flight from Marakesh. I spoke of my desire to obtain European garments, and the reverend fathers promised to send me to-morrow a Spanish woman, now the wife of an adjutant, who has served her apprenticeship as a dressmaker.

Even in this monastic cell, I am so distracted by noises that the observations just noted down, trivial as they are, did not go without an effort. My room takes up the whole width of the building. It was meant for a parlor, and I fear it will soon be transformed into a hospital. I have two windows. One gives on the oasis, and it is there that I have set my table. Spiced with the tart fragrance of pepper trees, the air is as exhilarating as strong wine. There are thousands of pigeons in the sycamores. Near the noria well, punctuating bad language with the blows of his matrack, a native squanders a wealth of curses on a blindfolded mule. This amuses me, in spite of my sadness; and all attempts at concentration are defeated by the strident call of grasshoppers.

I keep on writing, discursively, I know, and without aim, solely to answer a need of expression almost physical. At the other window it is still worse. There is a court-house on the opposite side of the street, and next to it a native school. The court-house is full of beggars and loafers who, cooling their feet in the basin receiving the spray of a fountain, roar in perfect contempt of court at each new denunciation of a woman who wants a divorce on the ground of gross neglect. She speaks through a wicket, not sparing the judge, who sits cross-legged on his prayer-carpet, and listlessly plays with his beads, a single detail of her conjugal disappointments. Her husband stands before the *cadi*, interrupting from time to time to utter a timid protest quickly silenced under a new volley of curses and hysterical shrieks.

Near by, threescore small boys, so dirty that flies hover in clouds around their faces, squat on a worn matting of palmetto leaves, bawling at the top of their voices the *alif, ba, ta, dza . . .* of the Arabic alphabet. The old *fokih*, his eyes burned with ophthalmia, is half blind. For this reason, the justice he deals is impartial. Whenever order is disturbed—and Heaven knows that these semi-naked barbarians are as fond of questionable pranks as other boys—he reaches for a long bamboo pole and begins to dust the crowd, blissfully unaware that his blows fall mostly on the matting.

I close both windows and try to muster my courage. A company of infantry, with drums and bugles, passes by, and I catch myself listening. It is my cue, perhaps. At this hour, at the head of his Legionaries, Captain d'Ornano is also on the road, on his way to the fort of the Wad-el-Haluf. Did I say Captain d'Ornano? General Pluvigné's first words, after I had given him my hand yesterday, were: "Mademoiselle, there is a fourth stripe to sew on these sleeves. We have just made . . . No, I am mistaken. Your friend d'Ornano has just made himself a major."

I was taken by surprise. I became purple, I am afraid, and I am sure that my words of congratulation were uncertain and long in coming. The visit had been entirely unexpected. For the first time in four days I had had time to think of my cousin, of Sidi-Malik and Djeïlma. The review of the past events had worked me into a state

of extreme nervousness. I thank God for the fact that General Pluvigné immediately came to my relief by speaking of my father.

It has been a long time since I wept so blissfully and so long. For a heart full to overflowing there is perhaps no better place than the shoulder of an old man and a friend. Captain d'Ornano—Major d'Ornano, I mean—did not stay long. I fancy that my stupid tears made him feel uncomfortable. He left, saying that he was going to the garden and would come back to say good-by. It was thus that I was informed that my departure was scheduled to take place in an hour.

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I shall put a line of points here, even if it is a feminine hypocrisy. There are thoughts which are my own to keep forever inviolate and words which cannot pass my lips. There are also remembrances which burn like a hot brand. I feel like hating General Pluvigné, in spite, or because, of his kindness. Above all, I hate myself. To try to remember the ridiculous scene causes me to make too many disagreeable discoveries. What does the General think of me? What did he surmise? He must have thought I was insane when I told him that I was too sick to leave, that nobody but my cousin could decently take me home, and that, moreover, it had been my ambition to serve as a nurse in the hospital corps. I flush at the thought that the light of puzzled perplexity in his eyes may have been fifty per cent friendly interest, and the rest pity or sarcasm. He is old, I know. He was father's friend. He did not attempt to confess me, and he gave me an hour to recover my senses. Yet I cannot bear the thought of having been seen in this attitude. In spite of all, I fear that every lieutenant in Figuig, learning the story, will presently come under my window to scratch a guitar and claim his share of my heart.

May 7th.—Major d'Ornano telephones that, the day before yesterday, he wrote to Si-Hamza in behalf of George and Sidi-Malik. He expects an answer to night.

May 8th.—I begin my duties under Doctor Dugon and his assistant Farlède. The hospital is almost empty. We have seven fever cases. But I am told that this period of quiet will not last long. Abd-er-Rhaman is preparing to attack Colomb-Bechar.

May 9th.—The oasis is a gigantic camp. Troops are incessantly crossing the square. The house of General Pluvigné is besieged by estafettes. It appears that Bou-Amel has covered with his harka the distance separating Igli from Ain-Chair. I am still without news of George and Sidi-Malik. Major d'Ornano calls me by telephone and tells me he will come down to-morrow. His promotion to the grade of major has been gazetted this morning in the *Journal Officiel*. The good news has reached him by wire and he is anxious to have his stripe sewed on.

May 10th.—The stripe is sewn. If our friend did not ask me why I am wearing the uniform of a hospital nurse, it must be that he guesses. I scarcely dare speak to him. His first care, when we met, was to show me a letter from his friend Si-Hamza. The message was written in French. It is so thoroughly characteristic of a modern descendant of the Prophet that I add it to my journal.

“EL-ABIOD-SIDI-SHEIKH, *May 7th.*

“MY DEAR D'ORNANO: I am acting on your suggestion. My uncle Mokrani and two of my cousins are starting for Igli this afternoon and will not leave a stone unturned. Your friends will be located and rescued if it depends only on my good-will. It is true that all the good intentions in the world seem just now to be of little avail and you must not be surprised if, within a day or two, you learn that I am leading the Ouled-Sidi-Sheiks against Figuig. You have already guessed that I am acting under compulsion. My relatives would long ago have proclaimed that the baraka of my ancestors has ceased to follow the direct line, had it not been that Abd-er-Rhaman, hoping to the last to convince me that victory will not, this time, desert the green banner, raised a protest in my favor. Two attempts to poison me have been made. The third might prove successful.

“Abd-er-Rhaman knows that ever since I sent in my resignation as lieutenant of spahis to take the succession of my father, I have used all my spare time breaking my horsemen to European methods of warfare. He is anxious to have me join him because he believes that, under me, the Ouled-Sidi-Sheiks will adhere to strict military discipline. He is in need of real troops and is disposed to concessions.

The rub is that I am more of a sportsman than of a conqueror. I regret the time of my regimental pranks, and, at the bottom of my heart, I yearn for nothing better than a stroll on Paris boulevards.

"I have not told Abd-er-Rhaman that the Koran has made room for Gyp and Jean Lorrain on my bookshelves. It is enough for him to know that my very firm impression is that the nut he has started to crack will prove too hard for his teeth. Since I cannot, at the same time, content myself and my people, I will satisfy my people; which is, at least the duty of a good chief. I think you know me sufficiently well to conceive how sorry I am to be thus compelled to oppose an army I love and my old friends. I am especially grieved to hear that you, d'Ornano, are in Figuig; the more so because I cannot believe that Figuig will withstand the shock of one hundred and twenty thousand men. I wish you luck, and with the hope that you will not think too bitterly of a rebel, I remain, the friend of Saint Cyr's Military Academy.

SI-HAMZA."

Major d'Ornano made no comments and I asked none. I believe he is sorry for his friend. I obtained from the head surgeon permission to accompany him this afternoon. He wants to show me the fort of the Wad-el-Haluf.

May 11th.—The net is tightening. Driven by the hordes of Berbers Abd-er-Rhaman has collected around him, the black troops have evacuated Colomb-Bechar. Bou-Amel has left Ain-Chaïr, and the Ouled-Sidi-Sheiks come sweeping down along the railroad line. Our communications are cut on all sides. The attitude of the natives in Figuig proper is uncertain. There is little doubt that their sympathies are with the advancing hordes, yet they quake with fear at the thought that if Figuig is taken their property will be plundered by the conquerors. As far as I can judge, we are in no danger, and the troops show boundless confidence. From the Wad-el-Haluf I saw yesterday eight bastions crowning the hill-tops. They are all strongly garrisoned, and three thousand troops, ready for emergencies, remain in the oasis. Major d'Ornano explained to me that the great principle of warfare is to bring against the weakest point of an enemy's battle-formation a stronger force

than he can muster himself. He told me that one soldier drilled by European methods will effectually check ten natives. As General Pluvigné is in a position to throw, in a minimum of time, three thousand picked troops at any given point on the perimeter of the oasis, this seems to imply that Abd-er-Rhaman cannot make a single move with less than thirty thousand troops. But I am not learned in these things. It is enough for me to know that danger is not immediate.

We have been informed to-day that Abd-er-Rhaman has declared his firm intention to adhere to the convention of Geneva. Doctor Dugon tells me that this is unheard of in African warfare. But he doubts very much whether the new Sultan, with all the good intentions in the world, will be able to prevent his troops from firing on the hospital.

May 12th.—The wounded of yesterday's affray are here. O God! Why do men maim themselves in this frightful manner? The hospital attendants are preparing the operating tables. I ran and am here, quaking, because, through the window-pane, I saw a negro sergeant, with his jaw blown off, raise himself and walk a few steps to shake the hand of the General. In his white apron, old Dugon looks like a butcher. I am sick from the smell of ether and chloroform. What will they do to him, who is up there? . . . The guns of the Wad-el-Haluf are booming. It has begun.

CHAPTER XVII

DJEÏLMA LETS FALL HER HAÏK

“Is this one Si-Hamza, there, on the left?”

And Djeïlma pointed to a group of horsemen who were leaving the gorge of the Wad-el-Haluf.

“No other, thou brightest of the flowers of the field,” answered Ben-Aïssa. “He is the man with the red saddle and trappings.”

“Then Si-Hamza is a very handsome man, Allah Kerim!” the Circassian resumed with conviction. “What answer did Sheikh Muhamed make when Si-Hamza asked him to set Sidi Leïtoun free?”

“Sheikh Muhamed said that Mustapha is a prisoner of the Rumis, and until he is set free he could not let Sidi-Leïtoun go. As for Sidi-Malik, he was grieved, but he had long ago been claimed by Bou-Amel. Si-Hamza replied that he was sure Mustapha had been set free yesterday; for such was the agreement that passed between himself and the Nazarenes; and he swore that Sidi d’Ornano would die rather than break a pledge. Si-Hamza was very angry. Si-Hamza swore that Sheikh Muhamed was the worst of the seven liars and as great a thief as his camel of a father before him. Sheikh Muhamed was also very angry. Sheikh Muhamed swore that there was no word of Mustapha. And it is true, Saïda. Had Mustapha been in the

camp, he would not have failed to come to remind thee of the promise which was made us the night we captured Sidi Leïtoun.

"May the mother of the Shaïtan spit in thy throat, Ben-Aïssa," screamed the Circassian, suddenly exasperated. "I wish Sidi Leïtoun had never been captured, and I am tired of the love of the Ouled-Ougouni. You are men of faint hearts and lying tongues. I hear nothing but compliments. Sidi Leïtoun alone is man enough not to do my will. Why should Si-Hamza be the father of lies when he is handsome, a great chief and a rich man? If Sidi Leïtoun is not set free before sunset, I will myself see what can be done. Who knows but that Bou-Amel is keeping Mustapha a prisoner?"

"And why should Bou-Amel keep him?"

"To avenge himself, Inshallah! Art thou a mule? Did not Sheikh Muhamed refuse to deliver Sidi Leïtoun into his hands. I will tell thee what I shall do. I am going to Bou-Amel's camp to find out."

"Shall I tell Sheikh Muhamed, Saïda?"

"Thou wilt hold thy foul tongue. Did I say that my concern was to help Sheikh Muhamed? I am going now. Get thee back."

In truth, aside from helping Si-Hamza, who was so handsome a man, her concern was no other than a desire to play a part in politics. A lingering hope was also left her that Leyton would perhaps become more tractable should she succeed in restoring him to freedom. But at the bottom of her determination there was the desire of acting a part. She had come to the conclusion that the position of professional beauty in a Moslem camp went

hand in hand with too much tranquillity of mind. And what was the value of freedom unless all she had of beauty and resourcefulness was actively employed in furthering the purposes of the men she admired and obstructing the ambitions of those she hated. Just now she was bent upon finding a plot which would give her the centre of the stage.

Think she must, because she was a member of the Caucasian family of nations, and because intellectual exercise was as necessary to her welfare as physical exercise to the bodily health of Ben-Aïssa or Khadour. She had happened to think of Si-Hamza and Leyton at the same minute. Hence an immediate desire to bridge the gulf between the two men. But she relied on inspiration to develop this theme into a plot more worthy of her endeavor.

If she had told Ben-Aïssa of her intention of journeying to Bou-Amel's camp, it was either with a desire to put him on a false scent or else the resolution was as soon abandoned as conceived. She reflected that, before firing her guns, it might be advisable to ascertain at what price Si-Hamza was disposed to buy her coöperation. Since she was bent upon gambling, she owed it to herself to play only for a high stake. True enough, she did not know yet what to ask, but she intended to study the problem and solve it before reaching Dar-el-Dokkar.

As soon as she saw Ben-Aïssa disappear, she began to descend. The bottom of the canyon was filled with troops. Occasional pools of water still glimmered in the deepest holes, and the steep banks afforded shade the greater part of the day. But between noon and two o'clock, when the sun struck perpendicularly, the rapid ascension of overheated air distorted all perspective. It took her

twenty minutes to reach the bottom; and long before she came to the first tents, she struck the lower stratum of atmosphere and began breathing with as much difficulty as if she had been immersed in the steam of a Hamam bath. Driss, terebinth and halfa grass had grown near the pools, but camels and donkeys had left only the stumps. There was a continual see-saw of chargers and beasts of burden at the water-holes. The scramble which, once in twenty-four hours, followed the shifting of shade from east to west had resulted in a hopeless mixup of the different tribes. Reckless gambling had done the rest. The fire-arms had already changed hands several times, and some corps, destitute of both horses and weapons, were already unfit. Abd-er-Rhaman, busy six hours a day righting such wrongs, lost in a night the results of a day's labor.

For all that, the Sultan was slowly bringing order out of the tangle, showing himself to be no less of a statesman than of a soldier. The pretensions of his ministry he had cut short by allowing the Minister of War to go and inquire about his crops, and by sending the Khaïd-el-Mechouar on a pilgrimage to Mecca. Knowing that after a victory he would be able to levy in Algeria upwards of two hundred thousand picked troops, he had eagerly welcomed Si-Hamza, the first Algerine to join him. It was his aim, as soon as possible, to dispense with the aid of the independent Berbers, and also with Bou-Amel's Saharans, pirates of the sands, whose chief business was, and always would be, to secure for themselves the fruit of victories gained by others. One thing he had already decided upon: Bou-Amel, if it could be managed, would always be made

to fight where more blows than glory were to be had. And still he would get more than he deserved, since he was in a position to enforce his claim to a share of one-fourth of all plunder.

From the first, the chieftain had played into his hands. Ordered to send the Tuaregg back to In-Salah, and compelled by popular clamor to dismiss the objectionable contingent, he had figured that such ready compliance on his part was worth a compensation, and had lost no time in asking for a favor. Transfuges from the oasis had brought word that d'Ornano was stationed in the bastion commanding Figuig's easiest entrance: the gorge of the Wad-el-Haluf. As this fort, by reason of its isolation, seemed to invite capture, Bou-Amel had asked leave to besiege it, calculating that a victorious assault would not only enable him to settle an old score, but would open Figuig to his raiders. Abd-er-Rhaman had granted the permission.

In so doing he had managed to satisfy four people. It is true that Bou-Amel's feeling of gratification turned to insane rage as soon as he discovered how hard to crack would be the nut he had reserved for himself; but the Sultan's and, above all, d'Ornano's delight were of a more lasting nature. Both beheld with the greatest exultation the mowing down of the Saharan troops as they attempted, under the fire of machine-guns, to climb the almost perpendicular cliff of sandstone embanking the Wad-el-Haluf. The fourth man was Si-Hamza.

So far there had been no steady advance of infantry, no attempt to gain and hold an advantageous position. Rapid dashes of cavalry had simply drawn the enemy's

fire to ascertain its volume, while scouting parties had been busy making a survey of the trenches. Figuig lay still so far away that the whole of Abd-er-Rhaman's army, encamped out of gunshot, flooded a wilderness of rocks and gullies. This unusual number of men encamped in these barren wastes raised the question of subsistence and seemed altogether unnatural. Only occasional glimpses of the oasis could be obtained, and those only in places swept by gun-fire. Men were swarming the sands like vermin. Some were black, and some were only of swarthy complexion. Some were on horseback, and some on foot. There were Berbers with red hair and blue eyes; Moors and Jews looking very much alike; lean M'zabites who loaned money on weapons and sold dates. There were horses, camels, hairy Spanish mules, herds of sheep, goats and braying donkeys. There were *sloughi* greyhounds and yellow curs of an impossible breed. Tents of all sizes, shapes and colors, and *gourbis* made of heterogeneous materials, sheltered the throng. Here a man slept naked in the sun, his head protected by his prayer-carpet. There, a grinning dead horse, with yellow teeth, was inflating, and near by a donkey covered with sores rolled himself in the dust. Yonder a giant negro howled because he had been bitten by a baboon, and near him a child led a blind lion by the rope. A crowd of twenty men had taken the trail after a mad dog which ran away, dejected, his tail between his legs, one eye put out with a stone, biting right and left. Here some deserters from an Algerine regiment were playing *truc* with Spanish cards. Over there a few youngsters were stoning an old woman. There were players of tom-tom and derbukha,

snake-charmers, medicine-men, Aissaoua, quacks and all manner of fanatics and fakirs. Some women, who had been bathing, were being kicked out of a water-hole by an enraged camel-driver. There were handsome young fellows with the face, the locks and the demeanor of a Christ; and there were loathsome specimens of humanity crumbling, eaten, dissociated by the most horrible of diseases. And, above all, there was noise: the infernal bustling, thumping, lovable and ear-rending uproar of the Oriental mobs. These people were as alive as green flies upon a carcass, and as filthy and ill-smelling as the carcass itself. They were quarrelling; for there were women and worse. But for all that they were picturesque, human, full of good and bad—mostly bad. Those who had garments at all knew how to dress, and all knew how to die. And all would have their heads broken because they were unwilling to concede that other men might believe that Allah is Allah without admitting at the same time that Muhamed is the Prophet of the Most High.

It was in the midst of this multitude that Djeïlma came unexpectedly upon Anoun-Dialo. The Senegalese seemed to be in great haste. He did not recognize the Circassian under the veil, and she hesitated to call him. Then she reflected that it was not here, in such a throng, when he had so many good reasons for concealing his identity, that the negro could offer her any violence. Unable to resist the impulse to give him a good scare, she ran after him and caught him by his burnous.

"*Ya illah*, Anoun-Dialo," she laughed. "Whither art thou going?"

Thunderstruck, the giant wheeled around. The realiza-

tion that he had fallen into the clutches of the witch who had engineered Leyton's and Sidi-Malik's capture brought an ashy pallor on his face. His first thought was to run. To free himself, he gave a vigorous shake to the burnous. Djeïlma was compelled to let go. But she caught him with the other hand.

"*Barca!*" she said sharply. "That's enough. The Wad-el-Haluf is a good place for a man-hunt. Remember that Bou-Amel is at one end of the canyon and Sheikh Muhamed at the other."

She added immediately, in a less threatening tone:

"I want no harm to befall thee, Anoun-Dialo. We have no quarrel. But I must learn why Mustapha was not set free yesterday."

"Him sick," the negro answered promptly, happy of the chance to propitiate at so small a cost a creature he had come to identify with the imp of the perverse. "Him wounded yesterday by bullet from Bou-Amel's camp. Sidi d'Ornano send him to the hospital in Figuig. Saïda watch over him. Him not much bad; only his knee-cap broken."

"Does Sheikh Muhamed know this?"

Anoun-Dialo vouchsafed no reply.

"Does Si-Hamza?"

Same silence. She asked again:

"Whither art thou going?"

Anoun-Dialo's right arm went from east to west in an uncertain gesture. Then he shrugged his shoulders and said a single word, the dissyllable Moghrabis invariably oppose to unwelcome questioning: "*Manarf.*"

"Thou dost not know, eh?" the Circassian resumed.

"Well, I also go to Si-Hamza. He went by half an hour ago; so it is useless to seek him here. We shall go together to Dar-el-Dokkar."

If the negro felt a pang, he remained master of his emotion. At any rate, he gave no sign of an intention to move.

"*Aroua, mena*," Djeïlma went on. "Thou art going to Si-Hamza. I know it. Shall I tell thee more? Sidi d'Ornano gave thee a letter for Si-Hamza telling him that Mustapha had met with an accident. If thou art caught with it, it will be known that thou art a spy of the Rumis."

The Yolof was the picture of stupefaction.

"*Mleh kateer, Akh arbi!*" exclaimed Djeïlma with unconcealed satisfaction. "Now ideas begin to enter thy black head. Listen to me. What will Sheikh Muhamed say when he learns that Mustapha is sick? He will say that Sidi d'Ornano has sent Mustapha to the hospital to be poisoned by the Rumi doctors. Is it not so, by Bebee Miriam? I know thy thoughts. Thou art afraid and Sidi d'Ornano is afraid that Sheikh Muhamed will seek revenge on Sidi Leïtoun."

Anoun-Dialo walked a little faster. Djeïlma smiled under the haïk.

"I can read the letter in spite of thy burnous," she went on, resolved to carry the mystification to its limits. "Sidi d'Ornano prays Si-Hamza to make haste to rescue Sidi Leïtoun before Sheikh Muhamed learns of Mustapha's misfortune. If I speak, Sidi Leïtoun is lost. If I speak now, thou wilt be hunted down through the canyon like a mad dog. But thou wilt do as I bid thee and I shall not speak."

There was no resisting the argument. As it was not the first time Anoun-Dialo had met with blackmail, he declared readily enough his willingness to serve her. This implied a large share of what casuists call the restriction of conscience; but it all entered into Djeilma's reckoning. And, moreover, to make assurance doubly sure, she made the negro swear. This was a mere formality, for she had already hit upon a simple plan which left no room for faithlessness. It consisted in getting hold of d'Ornano's letter.

"Thou wilt go to Si-Hamza and deliver thyself thy message," she dictated. "Then thou wilt tell him that I came to speak about the ways of freeing Sidi Leïtoun."

"Sidi Leïtoun alone?" asked the negro, "or Sidi-Malik with him?"

"May Sidi-Malik go to Jehanum!" came the reply. "He may be dead now, for aught I care. If Si-Hamza wants Sidi-Malik, let him go to Bou-Amel. I speak of Sidi Leïtoun only. Dost thou know where to find Si-Hamza?"

Anoun-Dialo did not know. As she had expected, he was totally unacquainted with the layout of the Moslem lines. Instead of leading him to Si-Hamza's headquarters, she struck for the imperial camp, trusting to luck.

It did not fail her in this instance. When they reached Dar-el-Dokkar, Abd-er-Rhman was just coming back from a reconnoitring tour. Si-Hamza was with him. After all other troops had been withdrawn, they had remained to watch the blunders of Bou-Amel. Mad as a bull, the Saharan chieftain had all the afternoon been throwing his Berbers against d'Ornano's Gibraltar. Not

only at each attempt had his men gone down the slope much faster than they had climbed it, but he had himself taken a plunge from his horse and been wounded in the hand by an exploding shell. This was the second time he had been made to bite the dust by the same adversary. To avenge both wounds he had undertaken a regular siege, throwing up useless trenches which he could not leave for a minute without exposing himself to decimating fire from above. In vain had Abd-er-Rhaman pointed out to him his mistake. Bou-Amel opposed to all reasoning an obstinate determination to storm the place. He had already lost three hundred men. These must and would be avenged, if he had to wait until Figuié had fallen to surround d'Ornano from every side and starve him out.

Abd-er-Rhaman had sent a German engineer to the old man with instructions calculated to help him obtain a semblance of result. The German came back half an hour later. Boasting that he was already waging a strong man's war when Abd-er-Rhaman was yet a child, Bou-Amel had declared his determination to storm d'Ornano's stronghold without having recourse to the deviltry of Rumi dogs. He was not in need of engineers, but of guns.

Stung to the quick by an answer evidently meant for a slight, Abd-er-Rhaman left the field in anger. Anoun-Dialo and Djeïlma came upon him just as he was reaching Dar-el-Dokkar—a well, a house and a few palms which broke agreeably the dreariness of the landscape. Although he was accompanied by more than a hundred sheiks, khaïds, aghas and bashaghas attired in all hues, the spotless white of his garments, and, above all, the crescent-surmounted red umbrella which a black slave raised high

above his head, made him an easy mark for recognition. Djeïlma watched Anoun-Dialo. The negro was thoroughly impressed. It would not be difficult to get hold of the paper.

It was the hour of prayer, and they were compelled to wait. Abd-er-Rhaman stood still, a rug of brilliant hues under the hoofs of his charger. Surrounding a barefoot iman in green gandourah, sheiks and khaïds were also silent and motionless. Foot soldiers on all fours prayed, faces in the dust, their crude weapons lying in front of them. The headless bodies of deserters, stragglers and criminals lay facing the Sultan, smearing with blood the thirsty sands. Behind the figures, the uniformity of cold gray walls served to bring into relief the high lights and shadows on horses and garments. A flaming sunset blazed beyond. On the rim of the canyon which fled towards the north, an unbroken wall of all hues, scarcely discernible figures of camel-drivers faced the east. The cold blues and purples of the foreground emphasized the religious expression of faces, and beyond, lilac, mauve and lavender, in superposed tones, gave value to the unfathomable perspective which rolled towards the northern mountains, cobalt blue in the powdered pink light that reached half-way to the zenith.

At no time could Abd-er-Rhaman appear greater than at this moment, when he was in truth God's elect, a shepherd of souls and a national champion, the very sword of Islam. While the imans sang the words of the surat, Djeïlma received from above the inspiration she was seeking. She pictured to herself victorious Moslem hordes surging around the Khalif who brandished the green ban-

ner, while the scarlet sun, ready to sink below the violet line, left behind it silver nails in a pale sky.

She now knew what to ask. Stirred by the desire for immediate action, she caught Anoun-Dialo by his burnous.

"Go," she said. "Now is the time. Si-Hamza is the man in red at the left of Our Lord Abd-er-Rhaman-es-Sheriff."

As she had expected, the negro shook his head. The giant on whose shoulders Abd-er-Rhaman had travelled the night of the attempted kidnapping in the Kutubia was too easy to recognize. A Sultan who feared so little the sight of decapitated bodies might take a fancy to add a new head to those already before him. Anoun-Dialo declared that he was in no hurry and that he would rather wait until Si-Hamza had left his master.

"But Si-Hamza will stay with the Sultan a long time," Djeïlma expostulated in apparent distress. "If Sidi Leitoun is not rescued to-night, to-morrow will be too late. Give me Sidi d'Ornano's *karta*. I will carry it myself."

Anoun-Dialo hesitated. But he reflected that he was entirely at the Circassian's mercy. In all likelihood he could not approach Si-Hamza without her help. He gave Djeïlma the note. She instructed him to await her return where he stood and started at a run.

Knowing that it would be impossible to approach the Sultan in the midst of such a concourse of people, she made at once for the gate. Abd-er-Rhaman, his staff following, was coming towards the house. She waited until Si-Hamza passed; then she uttered with great deliberation:

"One prisoner with Bou-Amel, Si-Hamza. One with Sheikh Muhamed. The third is still with the French."

Si-Hamza turned sharply in the saddle. She produced the paper, waved it a second, drew it again and awaited events, ready to swallow the message and to simulate insanity should her exclamation, instead of bringing the desired result, cause her to be annoyed by the questions of some by-standers. Si-Hamza entered the enclosure, giving no sign that he had understood. She bit her lips, thinking that she had failed. One behind the other, all the sheiks in the Sultan's retinue passed the gate. She had almost decided to go, when a horseman came out and looked around in perplexity. There were several women about, and he was at a loss to know to which of them Si-Hamza referred. But Djeilma made two steps towards him, dispelling his uncertainty.

"Didst thou call Si-Hamza?" he asked. "I am Mokrani. Is there a message from the French?"

"From whom among the French should Si-Hamza expect a message?" she inquired guardedly.

Mokrani answered question for question.

"Is there no dog barking in the Wad-el-Haluf?"

"Then there is a message, Inshallah!" she exclaimed. "If Mustapha has not been set free, it is because he is wounded in the leg. Tell Si-Hamza that Sidi Leïtoun is in danger. I am sent to discuss with him the best means to free him."

Mokrani reëntered the enclosure. He reappeared five minutes later.

"Si-Hamza bids thee go to his camp," he said. "Wait near his tent. He will join thee in a quarter of an hour."

Left alone, the Circassian wondered whether she had

anything to gain by taking French leave of Anoun-Dialo. In the fast falling darkness, this was by no means an impossible feat. But she reflected that the negro would now be well content to remain in the background, especially as the negotiations about to begin did not concern him. Moreover, with a companion of his size, the risk she ran in crossing the Moslem lines after nightfall was considerably lessened. If he asked for his paper, she could tell him that Si-Hamza had already received it. She went back to the negro and gave him a brief account of the results she had already obtained. Convinced now that she was working for the best of their common interests, Anoun-Dialo made no difficulty about following her.

They waited five minutes outside Si-Hamza's tent. Djeïlma kept silent. She was rehearsing her rôle and marshalling arguments for the coming encounter. At last the chieftain made his appearance.

Dismounting, he made a sign to the visitors to follow him. Djeïlma stopped Anoun-Dialo on the threshold. The negro was surprised at hearing himself sentenced to remain outside, but he did not demur. As Si-Hamza sat himself cross-legged on a rug, Djeïlma tendered him d'Ornano's note at the end of her finger tips, the gesture affording her an opportunity to display her bracelets and heavy rings. Then she closed her veil tight on her mouth and remained standing, an enigma in linen.

Si-Hamza read, pondered over the contents of the message and raised his glance. Djeïlma made not a move. He asked, already puzzled by her strange quiet:

"Did Sidi d'Ornano send thee here?"

"No," she said. "I stole the paper."

This was the first blow. It drew blood. The answer had been so decided and so aggressive that Si-Hamza considered her with amazement. She added with serene unconcern:

"What cannot be gotten by fair means has to be sought otherwise. The negro I left outside is a fool. I obtained the karta from him."

"Who art thou?"

The Circassian let her veil fall at her feet. Then she slid down, sitting in full light.

"I am what thou seest," she replied. "A name is nothing."

Of all feminine gestures, that which uplifts both arms towards the neck and raises the hair is perhaps the most graceful. Djeilma shook her curls. When she saw that Si-Hamza, a prey to a feeling in which bewildered admiration was uppermost, was silent, her smile became a laugh. If her aim had been to surprise and disconcert, she had succeeded beyond her expectations. By removing her haik unbidden, she had almost scandalized. But, unprepared as he was for a demonstration of this kind on the part of a casual visitor, Si-Hamza was not enough of a fanatic to remind the young woman that she stood in the presence of a descendant of Muhamed. Moreover, the branch to which he belonged had long ago ceased to breed rigorists. The drunkenness of old Si-Hamza, now dead, had been the standing joke of government circles in Algiers. It was rumored that the old man never failed to dip a forefinger in his champagne and to shake out a single drop, declaring with all gravity that "as the first drop of wine is accursed" the rest could be drunk without entailing a

breach of the precepts set forth by his ancestor. Young Si-Hamza dispensed even with this formality.

"Now that thou hast seen the means," the Circassian went on, "shall I tell thee what ends beauty can serve? When I belonged to Muley-Hassan's harem, I thwarted three times Abd-er-Rhaman's purpose by upsetting the cup of the poison-bearer. The negro I left outside will tell thee that I had grand eunuch Mustapha robbed of all his belongings and kicked as bare as a worm into the street. When Sidi-Malik beat me and Sidi Leïtoun declined to do my pleasure, I had both of them taken prisoners. It depends now on thee that Sidi Leïtoun is released before Sheikh Muhamed learns of Mustapha's wound. Thou art a witness that I can serve or cross many purposes. I came to learn what price thou art willing to pay for the life of Sidi Leïtoun?"

When it dawned upon Si-Hamza that this extraordinary preamble carried a carefully veiled threat, and served at most to cover an offer to barter Leyton's life and freedom against some palpable advantage, his amusement knew no limits. It was certainly the first time that a piece of impudence of this size was served him in such a cup. He got up laughing.

"Am I to infer that, if I am unwilling to pay thy price, Sidi Leïtoun is as good as dead?" he said at last. "Well worded for a blackmailer, woman-child. By what name am I to call thee?"

"Djeïlma."

"Well, then, Djeïlma, how old art thou?"

"Sixteen, ya Sidi."

"I see; too young not to make mistakes. . . . Is it

wise to run into the lion's mouth? What is good to look at is good to keep. Suppose I chose to keep thee here? Who will know there ever was a Djeilma?"

The Circassian flushed to the ears. It was a compliment, after all. She answered, smiling:

"I, at least, shall not forget it. Beware of thy wits, Si-Hamza. There is an exit wherever there is an entrance. Did Muley-Hassan keep me? Did Sidi-Malik? By making me a prisoner thou lovest thy right arm. We spoke of Sidi Leïtoun only. Free, I set him free. I did not say I would never come back."

"I see. . . . Then, if it pleases thee, let us speak of the reward."

Djeilma looked around, thought it over and ended by declaring:

"I want not money. Thou art not rich enough."

This time Si-Hamza lost all countenance. He wondered if he had not to deal with a practical joker. What notions had Djeilma of her own importance if she despised the bounty of Algeria's richest chief? True to her principles of warfare, she went on, without giving him time to recover:

"This is the bargain. I will serve thee for the excitement of the venture; and, so long as Sidi Leïtoun is not set free, I am thine to command. I shall also stay here a week if it is thy wish. Then, if I have a favor to ask, thou wilt remember that I have treated thee as a friend."

"So I will, Inshallah! provided it is in my power to grant the favor."

"It will be in thy power. I am told that thou art Abd-er-Rhaman's friend."

"I am his friend to-day. Still I may have fallen from favor next week. What is thy business with Abd-er-Rhaman?"

"My own business, as thou sayest. I must speak with him even as I spoke with thee. Thou wilt introduce me in his tent. If I can serve thee, I can serve him."

Si-Hamza consoled himself by inferring that it was either a clear case of megalomania or else that Djeilma had the bump of devotion somewhere on her cranium. It was no longer with amused curiosity, but with all the interest he would have brought to the solution of a problem, that he considered her. Partly to ascertain the earnestness of her purpose, partly to make the most of the present opportunity, he said:

"I shall put one condition only to the realization of thy desire. Dost thou consent to attempt also the rescue of Sidi-Malik?"

"Why not?" she inquired in quiet surprise. "He beat me; I am avenged. Wilt thou undertake to protect me from him?"

"Yes."

"Then I will see what I can do."

"It will be difficult, I warn thee. Whoever falls into Bou-Amel's clutches, if a friend of Sidi d'Ornano, may consider himself a dead man. Even I would not go to his camp without an escort."

She laughed in deprecation.

"Thou art not a woman, Si-Hamza. Of what use would it be for me to be more beautiful than most? Does not the wasp enjoy destroying the web painstakingly woven by the spider?"

CHAPTER XVIII

THE EYE OF THE WAD-EL-HALUF

Less than an hour later, her preparations now complete, she made her reappearance in the Wad-el-Haluf. Ben-Aïssa, who had vainly searched the whole camp for her, had sought Leyton's company. The repeated delays of Sheikh Muhamed in restoring him to freedom had put the American into a very bad temper, and he received Ben-Aïssa coolly. The young Arab, as downcast as a beaten dog, pondered in a corner of the tent over the causes of this unusual reception. Unable to bear a grudge against such a childishly irresponsible and light-hearted being, it had been Leyton's wont to receive him cordially. Conversation was impossible between them, but they had managed to understand each other by gestures. While the painter drew pictures of animals, which Ben-Aïssa admired with the noisy delight of a five-year-old, they had spent evenings pleasant enough. Now both of them were lying full length on a rug; the Arab in semi-darkness, Leyton under the lantern hanging from the tent-pole. His hands joined behind his neck, the Saharan sang a lullaby of the sands; the painter listened to the footsteps of the two men who kept watch outside, and without whom he was not allowed to leave the tent.

They had been together an hour, and Ben-Aïssa had

tried the power of four different songs, when the voice of Djeïlma was heard. She was asking the sentry whether Ben-Aïssa was with Sidi Leïtoun. The singer instantly got up.

In the course of the last two weeks the Circassian had more than once passed the threshold of Leyton's tent. At each visit she had taken a cruel pleasure in reminding the American that if he had behaved differently he would, to-day, be a free man. Only the night before, she had come purposely to tell him that Sidi-Malik had been handed over to Bou-Amel. Thinking that she came merely to stir to frenzy his desire to escape and delight in the spectacle of his enraged impotence, he closed his eyes and affected to sleep.

He heard Djeïlma push the curtain. Then the light fell full on his face. The Circassian had brought the lantern to look at him closely. The fact that he did not blink aroused her suspicions. She drew a blade of halfa from the matting and began to tickle him in the right ear. This meeting with little success, she borrowed a sheet of cigarette paper from Ben-Aïssa, rolled some dry tobacco in the palm of her hand until it was as fine as snuff and blew it in the nose of the sleeper. Leyton got up, sneezing, unable to command enough dignity to render his stare effective. She and Ben-Aïssa were laughing like children.

"Listen, Sidi Leïtoun," she said in the detestable French she always used with him, "and betray no surprise at anything I may say. I met Anoun-Dialo this afternoon. He told me that Mustapha was wounded in the leg and was sent to the hospital. I am going to tell Ben-Aïssa that Mustapha is in the hands of Bou-Amel. Look very

cross now. Ben-Aïssa must believe I brought thee bad news."

She turned to the Saharan and explained in Arabic that his cousin was a prisoner of the Maddhi. Greatly excited, Ben-Aïssa asked so many questions that she was at some pains to invent details plausible enough to substantiate her story. But a woman usually manages to drown discrepancies under a flow of information. Ben-Aïssa had no reason for suspecting her purpose. She turned again to Leyton.

"Now he believes me; and to-night Bou-Amel will be credited with everything. Friends of thine—I shall speak no names—will pay the price I asked to help thee escape. If I had cared to harm thee I would not have waited so long. Ben-Aïssa and I will presently go out. Do not leave the tent. Thou wilt find that I have concealed a knife under the matting. Now, strike me on the face and call me names. Ben-Aïssa must be made to believe that there is again a quarrel between us."

Hard as Leyton found it to fly into a temper merely for the sake of deceiving Ben-Aïssa, he acquitted himself creditably of his task. To bring the demonstration to an end, he drew his rug into the darkest corner of the tent and lay down, his back turned on his visitors. Unable to question him, Ben-Aïssa was compelled to content himself with Djeïlma's explanations. She swore that she had done nothing more than tell him that he would soon go to join Sidi-Malik, and that Bou-Amel would salt his hands. Then it was Ben-Aïssa's turn to take the painter's part and remonstrate. He was interrupted by a drone of derbukkas and tom-toms.

Djeilma got up and went out. The Saharan followed. Left alone, Leyton remained a long time listening to the beatings of his own heart. This drone of musical instruments, so often heard, had taken on all at once a formidable significance. He got up, blew out the lantern, searched under the matting for Djeilma's knife, and went noiselessly towards the entrance. He slightly pushed the curtain aside and looked out. A sentinel sat there, playing with his beads to kill time, his rifle on his knees, so near that it might have been possible to knife him. The night wind came to strike the American in the face. He breathed deeply. Under the stars, tents delineated their sharp silhouettes. The camp was pitched on a slope. Above him he saw the glare of torches. People were moving towards the source of light, which, to judge from the shadows, was close to the ground. The tents concealed from him the circle of interested spectators; but he had too often heard the music of the Ouled-Nails not to recognize Saharan dancers.

He wondered whether the presence of the dancing girls was part of a premeditated plan or merely an accident. Not impossibly, Djeilma, warned in advance of their coming, had decided to profit by the opportunity this visit afforded her. This part of the camp was now almost deserted. For a quarter of an hour Leyton remained still, wondering whether temptation would overcome his keeper's sense of duty. All of a sudden the man got up.

The American started when he heard his exclamation of alarm. He saw nothing. His amazement, however, became immeasurable as the face of the man emerged

from the darkness and took the color of red brick. Suddenly he heard a shout.

"Fire! . . . Fire! . . ."

The sentinel moved to the right. Inside the tent the prisoner followed in the same direction. With his knife, he made a hole in the cloth and looked out. At the extreme limit of the camp, at least three hundred feet away from the Ouled-Nails, tents were burning.

He scarcely dared believe that this was also Djeilma's work. In the distance he heard calls and shouts. His two keepers were now talking excitedly. As long as they stayed escape was impossible. Emotion and impatience shook him like fever. A man flew by, shouting:

"Every man to the fire. Sheikh Muhamed says every man. *Fissa, fissa!* The wind is against us."

One of the sentinels started at a run, passing his rifle to the other. Again Leyton lived through a second of anguish. The other man came towards the tent, unloosed a stake, pushed the weapons inside and disappeared. The painter ran to the other side and, with his knife, slit the tent from bottom to top.

He found himself facing Djeilma. He withdrew, taken aback. With a low laugh, she entered and came to him.

"I shall kiss thee now, Sidi Leïtoun!"

She flung herself on him, laughing and out of breath, making desperate attempts to reach his lips. The danger both of them were running served only to instil more fervor into her caress. Leyton stooped, only too glad to pay the price of freedom. There was no resisting the singular charm of this creature. For a minute he shared the intensity of her emotions, glad to have her panting

on his chest, swept by the storm that raged in her bosom. Obviously, it was absurd to apply his own standards to a being of this stamp. She was, in truth, the "vixen of the Country of Nod," impure, no doubt, and perverse; but this with utter unconsciousness. Like Don Juan, she was above criticism. The point was not settled whether she was the victim of passions for which she was not responsible or a poet in search of an unattainable ideal.

The part of the camp through which they made their escape was deserted. The conflagration threw blotches of red light between tents. They jumped from shadow to shadow, stumbling on stakes, pursued by the furious barking of dogs. At last they found themselves in the open.

A ten minutes' run took them to the place where Si-Hamza, Anoun-Dialo and a few men were waiting. Far away in the transparent distance, they heard the nostalgic whistling of fifes and the low drumming of tom-toms. Si-Hamza briefly congratulated Leyton on his escape. A three-year-old stallion, half Syrian, half Barb, was given him. With a laugh, Djeilma accepted the chieftain's invitation to ride behind him. One chaouch in front, to show the way, and the others on the flanks and rear, they went forth at a brisk pace, a shower of sparks flying from under their horses' hoofs.

It was not cold. In the silken, slate-colored sky millions of stars of an extraordinary brilliancy opened and closed their mysterious eyes. A wondrous milky way made a gigantic attempt at climbing to the zenith. On the north, jet black mountains rose as a barrier. On the south, the monotonous hamadan fled like a thief into the

thickening darkness, as bleak and desolate as the shores of the *Mare Tenebrarum*. Between, the canyon of the Wad-el-Haluf opened its gap, an occasional pool reflecting the stars. Myriads of moving lights, suggestive of some Chinese carnival, seemed to hang in midair, casting no shadow on the bottom. It was from there that the noise came; an uproar softened by distance; a sad music of ever-hopeful humanity voicing its loves and its cares; self-conscious dust of the dust seeking to attract the glance of the radiant chariots and retain the attention of the Maker who watches, immobile, the motion of the whirling spaces and never lifts a finger.

They rode for a quarter of an hour. In daytime they would have carefully avoided the place where Bou-Amel had pitched his camp; but it was night and the chaouchs were a sufficient protection. Strange to say, all was perfectly quiet in that part of the canyon. Si-Hamza had not expected to hear the chirruping of fifes and the snoring of derbukkhas on that side, but, knowing that nearly four hundred men had lost their lives in the day's affray, he anticipated an impressive ceremony of burial. To his surprise, no lamentations, no shrieks were to be heard. This was so little in accordance with custom that he thought of pushing his horse forward with the purpose of ascertaining the reason of this silence. As he spurred the animal, he was stopped by one of the chaouchs, who came back at this minute from a reconnoitring tour.

Leyton felt the dread of a night attack pass over him. A quarter of an hour went by. His ears, now used to the silence, were able to detect faint sounds. He waited, holding his breath. The sixth sense, that of impending

danger, was awake. Although he would have been unable to tell where the seat of perception lay, and what process enabled the brain to register the telepathic messages, he felt that he was probing the darkness. The slow motion of Bou-Amel's troops became as plain to him as if he had been watching in daylight. Perhaps the premonition of coming disaster had rendered his faculties of perception more acute, while lack of time in which to analyze his sensations forbade him to investigate the relation existing between the effect and its cause. All of a sudden a yell went up. It was not until he saw the flashes of fire-arms, however, that he realized how near d'Ornano's bastion Bou-Amel had succeeded in leading his troops. Perhaps the sentinels in the fort had been deceived by the time-worn trick of the progressing bush or boulder. His blood ran cold at the thought that this was to be a hand-to-hand fight, and that the defenders of the bastion, surprised, answering half dressed the call to arms, and still half asleep, would each have to prove a match for a hundred Saharans or Berbers more used than themselves to cold steel.

He had scarcely time to think all this, however, when he was struck by the absurdity of the notion. D'Ornano was too wary, and knew the Saharans too well, not to be on his guard. He not only possessed night spy-glasses, but he had surely been impressed by this unusual silence. He could not have failed to notice that bivouac fires were not burning. Why he had allowed Bou-Amel to progress thus far had yet to appear. Leyton did not have to wait long. The Corsican's purpose became obvious even before the storming party's war cry began to awaken the echo of the cliff.

The witnesses of this scene might have sworn it was an earthquake. The horses began rearing. Leyton was bent on the neck of his mount, finding it hard to keep the stirrup, when he saw the earth open with a great flame and he noticed that the part of the cliff immediately under the bastion was moving; gently separating itself from the rest of the mass; leaning bodily towards the ravine at an angle of twenty degrees; falling, slowly at first, and then crumbling into a million pieces with the roar of a thousand guns. An electric search-light punctured the sky.

A rain of fire was now pouring down from the unattainable bastion; rifles, machine-guns, a battery of 75mm. field artillery and mountain guns. The murderous milky ray now searched the canyon as a terrier searches a cave. From below not a shot came. No doubt, the Saharans thought that the supernatural light, hitting here and there and dealing death, was responsible for the catastrophe. And who will fight against the light of Heaven! A hideous shriek of supreme terror and despair made itself heard through powder smoke and fusillading. The search-light, glance of a malignant, one-eyed cyclops, turned slowly to the east. Cadaverous in the ghastly ray, Leyton wheeled his horse around and saw that he was alone with Si-Hamza and the Circassian. The chaouchs were in full flight, riding like mad towards Dar-el-Dokkar.

Two minutes had not elapsed when they again felt the same tremor of the ground. The flame, this time, sprung skywards from the river-bed. It was all too evident that d'Ornano had kept quiet only to catch Bou-Amel in this fire-trap. And still bullets kept on raining, and machine-guns kept on rattling, while the ghastly ray searched every

hole and shrapnel shells as beautiful as falling stars left a trajectory of light in the star-spangled sky, whistling and exploding with the muffled sound of Fourth-of-July pyrotechnics. The black northern mountains looked on from under their mantle of stars. Death was at work in the canyon—grim, ugly death, the kind that kneads into paste and crushes beyond recognition the soft, fat, fluid-filled bodies of men. Bou-Amel's followers fled, a herd of stampeded cattle jostled in a whirlwind of terror. Appalled, obscurely wondering why a being as soft as a snail, a mollusc that can be disabled by any one of three blows dealt with the bare hand, should need resort to explosives to carry on his rabid warfare and steal, Prometheus-like, the thunder of the Gods, Leyton, turning his back to the Wad-el-Haluf, now filled with dead, followed Si-Hamza towards Dar-el-Dokkar.

CHAPTER XIX

ABD-ER-RHAMAN-ES-SHERIFF

Leyton slept badly. The horror he had witnessed revived in a nightmare, and an artillery duel had begun. At daybreak he was awakened by Si-Hamza, who told him that Bou-Amel had lost close upon two thousand men. Aroused from his sleep by the roar of the explosion, the Sultan had spent part of the night on the scene of the disaster. In his terror and affliction, the Saharan chieftain had thrown himself on his knees, begging his chief to let him have, until they were needed elsewhere, the few guns the Moslem army possessed. Abd-er-Rhaman had lent him two Krupp guns manned by Turkish artillerymen under the command of a German officer.

All hopes of storming the bastion were now gone. The part of the cliff which had fallen had left the rock with a perpendicular face which even a wild ram could not climb. For want of a proper explosive, the Krupp guns had been unable to inflict much damage upon the bastion; but, on account of their longer range, they had easily reduced the 75mm. field artillery to silence. They had kept on firing until Abd-er-Rhaman, happening along, had undertaken a personal survey of the situation. He had then forbidden this useless waste of ammunition, upbraiding the German officer for not taking into account the fact

that the foe was now under cover. At present all was quiet. Abd-er-Rhaman had summoned his aghas to a council of war. Most of the chieftains were already in Dar-el-Dokkar, awaiting his return.

The Sultan reappeared shortly afterwards, and Si-Hamza left the tent. He was gone two hours. When he came back he informed Leyton that Abd-er-Rhaman desired to see him.

The abrupt announcement took the American by surprise. His first thought was that Sheikh Muhamed had complained of his escape. But he reflected that Djeilma had manœuvred far too cleverly to warrant the hypothesis that the Ouled-Ougouni had been able to get at the truth in so short a time. He questioned Si-Hamza; the young man merely laughed and declined to answer. But he did not lose sight of the decorum the bewildered artist was on the point of forgetting. He ordered a chaouch to dismount and to give the American his horse and his burnous. Leyton was now fit for court presentation. A five minutes' ride took them to the place where the Sultan and his escort were waiting.

As soon as he saw them, Abd-er-Rhaman pushed his horse forward. He addressed the painter in English.

"I understand that you are an artist from the States, Mr. Leyton," he said. "Is it true that you studied under Latimer Morpes?"

"It is perfectly true, your Highness," the American answered with considerable astonishment.

"I beg you to overlook my questioning," the Sultan went on. "But I knew Morpes in India, and I cannot do otherwise than welcome you for his sake. Can you give me news of him?"

"Willingly, your Highness. He is well. That is to say, he was well three months ago, when I left England."

"I hear that he is busy trying to be knighted and that he finds the Royal Academy to be real, English made, sterling comfort. He will soon turn to tricks à la Meissonnier, no doubt, and will paint the trodden snow of a Russian retreat by means of barrow wheels and bags of salt. You will earn my everlasting gratitude by reminding him that Verestchagin died like a man on the hurricane deck of the *Petropavlovsk*. Would you mind telling him that North Africa and its people are worthy of his color-box? I mean, one of these days, to write him to come and pay us a visit. He will find old friends here. Generals Raleigh and Fitzgerald are coming to watch the operations, and will be here in a week. Then, I am told that the war correspondent the London *Times* is sending us is no other than Lanyard, dubbed Jehanum Sahib, another friend."

The painter was too astounded to say a word. He had come fearing to be treated as a spy, and the image he had in mind was that of a George Leyton slashed to ribbons by a dozen sabres. In vain had Si-Hamza reminded him that he was an American born, that for all the inherited sternness of Sultans, who for centuries past had shown little regard for foreigners, the late Sirdar was too well posted on questions of international politics to indulge in the costly pleasure of alienating public feeling in America and in England. When it was thus made known to Leyton that the Commander of the Faithful was a man of his day attached to his friends, his sigh of relief was audible. It is true that the four men Abd-er-Rhaman

had named had all proclaimed the genuine love they felt for Islam. But the interview was not yet at an end. The conversation reserved surprises of another order.

"Si-Hamza tells me you were fortunate enough to escape alive from Marakesh," Abd-er-Rhaman went on. "I can congratulate you the more heartily, for the massacre of the European population was engineered and carried out expressly against my orders. Since you are unable to speak Arabic, I consider it wonderful that you have succeeded in crossing the Adrar N'Draren and the desert. But you are used to narrow escapes, are you not, Mr. Leyton; and you are something of a sportsman?"

"What does your Highness mean?" stammered the artist, unable to account for the flame of irony which blazed in Abd-er-Rhaman's eye. "The feat will surely appear much less remarkable when I tell you that I owe my life to a caravan master."

"Indeed! Then I must have been misinformed. Si-Hamza spoke of a Corsican friend."

At this direct thrust Leyton lost all countenance. The glance he stole at Si-Hamza was murderous. At least the young chieftain might have told him he had spoken of d'Ornano. But the Sultan went on as if the confusion of his interlocutor had escaped his notice.

"Your friend is a remarkable man, Mr. Leyton. It has come to my ears that, since you were separated from him, he has managed to defeat, single-handed, a party of Tuaregg sent in pursuit by Bou-Amel. But we all know that Bou-Amel is unlucky. This friend of yours, at any rate, seems to me to be the man best adapted to improve bad situations. I was telling Si-Hamza as much before

you came. It is his opinion, and by this time it is also Bou-Amel's opinion, I believe. You see, we are delighted to face adversaries who make the game worth while. Major d'Ornano and I are already old acquaintances. Two months ago, in Marakesh, he kidnapped me and shot down six of my men."

The unbearable irony of his glance roused the American. There was now no doubt that Abd-er-Rhaman had recognized in him one of the four men who had come so near crushing his ambitions in the egg. Morally certain that there was nothing to gain by attempting to dodge the issue, he said coolly:

"I ought to know something of it, your Highness. I killed four of them myself and I was rewarded by a bullet in the shoulder."

"I am sorry. I did not know about the shoulder."

"Your Highness, I must take the liberty of observing that the shooting was done strictly in self-defence. The order to kill was not given by us."

"Certainly not, certainly not. I distinctly remember the incident. I shall not even ask you if kidnapping is fair in war; you would be justified in answering me that it was not war. You did not know what the Kutubia had in store for you, if you had been caught, and the precautions I took to make Captain d'Ornano a prisoner rendered the kidnapping a matter of necessity. We wont quarrel over this. I must say, however, that I am totally unable to sacrifice an offender to the revengeful hatreds of the secret societies of my own land. But you were excusable not to know this.

"Your Highness will render us this justice that, on our

side, we tried not to depart from chivalrous behavior. If you were handled a little roughly, I regret that the circumstances . . .”

“Certainly. . . . Curiosity took you to the Kutubia the day curiosity took me to Marakesh. I shall not complain of a coincidence to which I owe the pleasure of your acquaintance. I would not for a world have Lanyard tell me, when he gets here, that I have forgotten the meaning of the word ‘sportsman,’ so dear to his English heart. For this reason I told Sheikh Muhamed, who came this morning to complain of your escape, that his Saharan understanding of the hospitable duties might be improved in several particulars. I also declared to him that his best course was to wait patiently until his son leaves the hospital. Perhaps you might care to remain in camp and collect material for future work. In this case, I shall issue orders that you are given every opportunity to watch the operations. If you follow Si-Hamza to-day you may perchance enter Figuig. But let me advise you to give Bou-Amel’s camp a wide berth. D’Ornano’s friends are not popular in the ravine. May I ask you to send me the first study you will make of my cavalry?”

“I shall be delighted, your Highness. . . .”

“Then wait a minute. It is only right that the sovereign should encourage the painter.”

He made a sign to a chaouch and, to Leyton’s wonder, Anoun-Dialo was brought forward in fetters.

“You will now understand how I came to remember my friends of the Kutubia,” the Sultan explained. “To tell the truth, I would never have recognized in you one of them. Captain d’Ornano, of course, I have not forgotten.

But he spoke to me where there was light. As for Anoun-Dialo, I would have recognized his shoulders among a thousand. You have here an excellent friend, Mr. Leyton; a little afraid of decapitation, perhaps, but not enough of the punishment of salt, to my notion. In your place, I would tell him that wisdom consists in forgetting Sidi-Malik."

Without giving the painter time to thank him, he was gone, galloping away at the head of his chieftains. At Si-Hamza's command, the chaouch cut the ropes which tied the Yolof. They learned from him that he had been captured in the height of success, after he had managed to search Bou-Amel's camp unchallenged. He was on his way back to tell Si-Hamza that he had seen Sidi-Malik, when Abd-er-Rhaman had recognized him and made him a prisoner.

"What's that?" interrupted Leyton. "Did he really succeed in reaching Sidi-Malik? Where did he find him?"

"In the caves of the Zousfana," replied Si-Hamza, who translated the answers of the negro. "He has been hands in the salt since midnight. I suppose that Bou-Amel has decided to avenge in this fashion the set-back we witnessed from the bank of the Wad-el-Haluf."

Leyton's first impulse was to jump on horseback and to gallop after Abd-er-Rhaman. On soberer thought, however, he realized that the Sultan, great as his desire to make himself agreeable to foreigners might be, would evidently draw the line at Sidi-Malik. He could not fail to consider the camel-driver a traitor to his religion, his country and his people. Indeed, it was very doubtful whether Si-Hamza himself, free from fanaticism as he

was, would not loathe the thought of engineering the rescue of the man who had sold to the French the secrets of the Senussiya. He had, it is true, sent messengers in search of him; but this was before he had become acquainted with the true character of the informer; and Leyton had begun to fear that Sheikh Muhamed had said too much. He was aware that Sidi-Malik was not likable at a distance. As it was evident that the camel-driver possessed more enemies than friends, both Si-Hamza and the Sultan would be well content to leave him to his fate. But it was necessary to act at once; and neither he nor Anoun-Dialo could risk themselves in Bou-Amel's camp when they knew that the Saharan chieftain, in his maddening desire for revenge, would torture all the acquaintances of d'Ornano who would fall into his power.

The help he did not dare ask from Si-Hamza was tendered him by the young sheikh. Questioned about the caves of the Zousfana, Si-Hamza answered that they were former troglodytic habitations occasionally used as granaries. When the Moslem army reached Figuig, the caverns had been found partly stocked. Their contents had been rifled by Bou-Amel. The fact that the barley thus obtained belonged to natives of the oasis and not to the French was a consideration of little weight with the unscrupulous Maddhi. The ruthless seizure of these stores had been the direct cause of his misunderstanding with Abd-er-Rhaman. The caves were at some distance from Bou-Amel's camp and poorly guarded. To effect Sidi-Malik's rescue might prove by no means a difficult task.

There was little time left for discussion of ways and

means. Si-Hamza was wanted elsewhere. They decided that Djeïlma must undertake to acquaint the camel-driver with the attempt they were about to make in his behalf. She must take with her dates and figs, for they had learned that Bou-Amel, whose first plan had been to starve his captive, had refused him food for the last two days. For fear that she would not succeed in reaching the prisoner, Si-Hamza would put Aïssaoua on the trail, with instructions to them to do all they could to relieve Sidi-Malik's sufferings.

It was now half-past eight. Fighting was already in progress at several points. It was now evident that Bou-Amel's troops would take no effective part in the day's operations. The chieftain sat immovable in his purpose to storm d'Ornano's stronghold; though he fretted considerably over the fact that Abd-er-Rhaman had withdrawn from him the artillerymen and the Krupp guns. He was now planning to rush his troops into Figuig by way of the river-bed. To accomplish this, his men would have to pass under the fort and hurry through the zone swept by the fire of rifles and machine-guns. Once in the oasis their position, far from being improved, would become as desperate as that of a rat in a trap, since eight bastions, instead of one, would meet their advance by a rain of shot and shell.

Knowing this, Bou-Amel had resolved to delay his move until word reached him that some other body of troops had made an entrance. Then he would follow, immediately completing the investing circuit around d'Ornano's position. He would then starve the garrison or obtain from the other forts the guns which would raze the defences and compel a surrender.

Abd-er-Rhaman, who thought the plan an absurd one, had taken care that the Maddhi should be apprised of the opinion he entertained of his poor generalship. The silent obstinacy of the one-eyed chieftain incensed him. Through Bou-Amel's determination to settle old scores, forty thousand men had become useless and would be mere food for d'Ornano's guns. The Sultan was now sure that his victory, certain as it was, would cost him more than the possession of the oasis was worth. Bou-Amel would be the chief sufferer; and nobody cared what would befall his undisciplined troops; but the bad effect of a Pyrrhic victory on the world at large did not leave Abd-er-Rhaman indifferent. Great losses, by casting a slur on the ability of the general in chief, would render recruiting far more difficult, and would increase the confidence of the French troops. The very thing Abd-er-Rhaman could not afford to lose was the faith of his people. It was that faith which the chieftain's obstinacy was now threatening. Although it was not in his power to inflict disciplinary punishment, the Sultan could in a way retaliate. He changed his decision to bestow Figuig as a fief on Bou-Amel, and promised it to Si-Hamza if he entered the oasis first.

All this was explained to Leyton as he rode forth alongside the young chief. Si-Hamza was in high spirits. Saint-Cyr's worst cadet, the *Pere Système* of his class,* had no concern whatever with tactics and strategy. He was naught but a brilliant horseman, a sort of gilded and feathered Murat. His thoughtlessness rose to the level

* The *Pere Système* of Saint-Cyr is the man who graduates at the foot of the class.

of his courage. Fortunately, he had enough sense to take advice; and the Ouled-Sidi-Sheiks placed full confidence in the baraka of his family. All the details of the day's operations had carefully been gone over, the previous evening, by Abd-er-Rhaman and his German General Staff. Si-Hamza's task was to break through the enemy's lines, to call the people of the oasis to arms and to await orders. The thought of what the infantry would do behind him gave him little concern. Abd-er-Rhaman had said: "Get into Figuig and rouse the Moslems to battle!" He would get into Figuig no matter how. The way had been chosen for him; it was therefore practicable. He understood very well that once in the place his duty would be to attack the foe in the rear; but there would be a German officer at his side to think in his stead and direct him where to strike.

Soon afterwards they reached the ground where the Ouled-Sidi-Sheiks were waiting under arms. Realizing all the risks attendant upon this adventure, Leyton thought of prudence first, then upbraided himself for being a coward. He was pleased to think of his interview with Abd-er-Rhaman as of a turning-point in his career. In truth, as he was not taking sides, and as his sympathies were, if anything, with the French defenders, risking his life with Si-Hamza might appear totally barren of benefits. But he thought of the painter Alfred de Neuville fighting at Champigny, Longboyau, and Buzenval; of Henri Regnault, his life's blood ebbing away on the frozen snow of Paris ramparts. Had he not decided to try his luck as a painter of battle-fields? There were two schools. Some followed the armies to dodge bullets if

they could. The *profanum vulgus* of the craft slowly died of gas inhalation in some London studio beset by fog.

They found the Ouled-Sidi-Sheiks already formed in squadrons. Before leaving Leyton, Si-Hamza assigned him a place in the middle ranks, intrusting him to his uncle Mokrani, an elderly man with a magnificent beard, who was to see that he ran no unnecessary risks. Abd-er-Rhaman sent shortly afterwards five squadrons of Beni-Matar. Si-Hamza had now close upon twenty thousand men. With drawn yatagans, erect in the saddle, their burnouses so thrown over the shoulder as not to interfere with the movements of the right arm, they were waiting motionless. On the whole, the painter had never seen a finer body of horsemen. Not only were they unmatched for the figure they made in the saddle, but their motionless, sunburnt faces bespoke a tranquillity of feeling unattainable by any but the fatalistic Moslem. Conversations were few and jokes unheard. All were intently watching small pickets of infantry, on the move towards the bastion upon which Abd-er-Rhaman had concentrated the fire of his Krupp guns.

The void of the battle-field was absolutely overwhelming. Firing had now developed volume on both sides. At least forty thousand Moslem troops were packed within a five-mile radius; yet all that could be seen of the operations was the smoke of fire-arms and the occasional dash of a score or two of men. Nothing more startling than the sudden appearance of a small body of troops, its two hundred yards' sprint and its sudden collapse and disappearance! It might have seemed a game of hide-and-seek except for the aerial death that now and again struck

a runner in full career. Bullets raised the dust where he had been. One shell exploded behind, one in front and one straight overhead. And yet, two minutes afterwards, he made the same startling reappearance and renewed the performance until the wind of death bowled him over.

It was the same for the artillery. As soon as one captain had the range, the chief of the opposing battery removed to some safer spot. Three times out of five he succeeded in reversing the rôles, and then profited by the few minutes that were left him to shell the infantry and the cavalry of the foe. Here, nevertheless, Abd-er-Rhaman was at a decided disadvantage. His cannon was not as quick-firing and mobile as the French guns.

CHAPTER XX

"PARADISE IS UNDER THE SHADOW OF SWORDS"

Leyton had been watching for half an hour, when all of a sudden he caught sight of an estafette riding at full speed towards the Ouled-Sidi-Sheiks. Anticipating an order to charge, Si-Hamza raised an arm to command attention. All his khaïds repeated the gesture. The painter lowered his glance shamefacedly, knowing that he was losing color.

A hopeless feeling came over him. He was sure he would see nothing of the fight. He could not take his eyes off Si-Hamza. The arm of the sheikh, still extended, took a horizontal position.

Instinctively giving rein, Leyton pressed the knee. Slowly, very slowly, the horses began to move. Si-Hamza's clenched fist and yatagan went up and down three or four times in rapid succession. The American brought his heel to his horse's flank and clacked his tongue. This was trot.

They trotted two minutes. Leyton wondered. Arab horses are not taught trotting. Perhaps Si-Hamza's two years in Saint-Cyr had not been lost time, after all. In front of the column, bullets began to raise the dust. The sloping ground was yellow and uniform. Nothing could be seen of the bastion, nothing of the oasis. Behind them,

a little to the right, some infantry, in deployed formation, advanced by leaps and bounds. Outside of powder smoke, the universe was themselves, a few shrubs, the ochrous sands and the blue sky.

They were being shot at. Spent bullets did not constitute a danger; but the field-guns were trying the range, some of the shells falling short of the mark, others bursting too far off. All at once Leyton saw, at his eye's level, a red flame. Then the universe rent asunder.

He had closed his eyes instinctively. When he opened them he saw four bundles of bleeding stuff blocking his way. Human shape, blighted by the fearful wind, was no more. Sweating, and a prey to nausea, rapid chills running up his back, he passed by, feeling deathly sick. He sought Si-Hamza's arm despairingly. God! God! when would it move? The captain of that field battery had the range and shells were now coming fast. Si-Hamza's arm began to describe circles. Gallop! . . . His heart leaped. At last action would relieve this agony. He saw Si-Hamza's face and heard a hoarse voice:

"Aroua! Aroua mena! Ya illah il Allah; ya Muhamed raïs ul Allah!"

A spring from his horse threw him backwards in the saddle. He was caught in the whirl of a tempest of yells:

"Ya illah ul Allah. Ya Muhamed raïs ul Allah! Allah Akbar!"

The rest was a blur; a sensation of motion similar to that experienced when two express trains pass each other. The shriek filled the heavens. A torrent, a tornado swept the hot sands. The burnous of a neighbor slapped him in the face; a yatagan whistled dangerously close.

The head of his leaping horse struck him lightly on the chin. With no eye for the landscape that fled behind, he was intent solely upon freeing his right knee, caught between the saddle and the boot of his neighbor.

The column was fired upon from two forts. The horsemen of both sides, instinctively closing upon the centre, had so reduced the space allowed laterally to each man that the whole mass now moved with the compactness of a Roman testudo. But its motion forward was not hampered; and as they penetrated deeper within the zone swept by shot and shell, voids in the ranks eased the pressure. Leyton was conscious of a great emptiness in the stomach and of an accrued sensitiveness of the scalp. Without being aware of it, he was talking aloud. His personality was strangely disjointed, severed into its component parts as it were; his moral self accusing his physical self of cowardice, and the latter offering whatever excuses it deemed most likely to soothe its enraged master. Fear that his horse would be wounded and throw him into the midst of this inferno had him by the throat. Two or three times he felt that he was trampling some wounded man. Horses he often jumped. When his mount sank to its knees he gave a scream.

The stallion had only stumbled. He rose. The Ouled-Sidi-Sheiks were still climbing the slope. Once Leyton turned his head and beheld the ground behind him covered with fallen horses and horsemen. It was but a glimpse; but it was enough to show him that all who had fallen were not dead. Riders without horses held up their hands in sign of surrender. Some struck by bullets fell down, face in the dust. Others sought con-

cealment behind corpses. Horses without riders galloped aimlessly here and there. Then, projectiles came their way, and they turned turtle after fits of violent kicking.

When he looked again towards the front he failed to see Si-Hamza. But before he had time to fear for the young man he realized that the front ranks had reached the top and were now going down. Ten seconds later he saw the oasis.

Figuig was there, at the bottom of the hollow, a lake of palms. A sigh of relief escaped him. The column was out of rifle range. His feeling of comparative safety did not last long, however. They had been seen from all bastions, and death was now on all sides. The palms, which alone could afford some shelter, were still far away, and shells, coming from everywhere, followed them as they moved forward.

He thought with despair that this would be annihilation, that this slope would be his grave. He felt so thirsty that he tore a button from his caftan and put it in his mouth to stimulate salivation. On! On! His horse was covered with foam. The palms appeared nearer now. Another minute passed by. Suddenly, issuing from behind a ridge, a squadron of Chasseurs d'Afrique took them in flank.

Six hundred men, all told! When he realized that this handful of centaurs had assumed the apparently impossible task of breaking the impetus of Si-Hamza's cavalry, Leyton remained open-mouthed, his admiration and enthusiasm verging on tears. For twenty seconds he was able to watch the rhythmic motion of the frenzied horses. They plunged forward with heads upheld, the reins flat

on the neck, springing like gazelles at the contact of the spur. Some made desperate attempts at getting hold of the bit, the mouth soapy with pink foam. Their riders were bent on the saddle, their right fist helving the sabre and resting against the body, slightly above the belt.

There was a shock, a sudden stop and a general collapse. The painter's horse, his neck on the rump of another animal, hard pressed from behind, sat down so suddenly that the stirrup leather snapped under the weight of his rider. For a minute Leyton was in the vortex of this cyclone. At his side, Khaïd Mokrani grabbed more solidly the reins of his bridle and prepared to strike, the blade of his yatagan over his left shoulder. All around it was a rumble of men and beasts. The painter was ground between, rolled from right to left. Knees were crushing his legs. His horse, getting up, began rearing. Shots were fired almost in his face. He heard the clash of yatagans against sabres and saw the gleam of shining steel prolong the gesture of naked arms. Bitten by curved blades, swarthy faces were streaming with blood. A push more violent than the preceding disengaged the Chasseurs. It was over; the squadron had cut clear through the Moslem lines. But at what cost! Scarcely two hundred men remained in the saddle. They made straight for the oasis.

Leyton saw Si-Hamza gallop after a lieutenant who had fallen, face downwards, on the neck of his mount. He caught hold of the bridle and succeeded, after a struggle, in quieting the frightened animal. A chaouch took charge of the wounded man. Back in his place at the head of the column, Si-Hamza raised his arm and

described a circle. Gallop! They had not covered a mile when a wall of powder smoke rose before them, hiding the oasis. They heard the rattle of machine-guns.

Leyton saw men fall around him like withered leaves. No longer master of his wounded horse, he was separated from the main body of the column. For a minute he attempted vainly to recover control. To avoid turning turtle with the saddle, he had been compelled to abandon the other stirrup. Undoubtedly this saved his life. Weakened by the infernal gallop and the loss of blood, the stallion fell foul on the root of a terebinth, stumbled, rolled over himself and broke his neck.

Dazed by the fearful fall, Leyton got up painfully, feeling for broken ribs. He was on the bank of an irrigation canal, alone and unhurt. The nightmare was a thing of the past.

He flung himself face downwards. His thirst quenched, he made a rapid survey of his surroundings. Ten feet away lay his dead horse. On one side was the dreary slope strewn with dead; on the other the peace and fragrance of sunny gardens. The shells had followed the Ouled-Sidi-Sheiks. He heard shooting in the distance. Inferring that Si-Hamza had come in contact with French troops, he went northward.

Very soon he came upon a Moslem cemetery. Crossing it, he found himself on a macadamized road at the entrance of a ksar. There had been no fighting in this village, but he heard firing a little way to the north. The ksar was deserted. Mud houses and mere gourbis with thatched roofs stood around a dilapidated mosque. Frightened hens were all that was alive in the place. A

wrecked wagon, filled with manure, occupied the middle of the road, and a horse had broken a foreleg by coming unaware upon the obstacle. No rider was in sight. Leyton shot the sufferer.

He thought he would climb on top of the mosque's minaret to see whence the firing proceeded. As he passed the threshold he met with the mutilated bodies of two men who wore the uniform of the Bataillons d'Afrique. On his way up he found another soldier who had been thrown headlong on the staircase. All were dead. On top he encountered a fourth corpse who wore the badge of a telephone operator. His instrument was untouched, but the wires were cut. The painter found the tool that had been used in the cutting in the clenched fingers of the dead man. Leyton assumed that natives of the oasis were responsible for the deed; Si-Hamza's goums would have preferred cold steel.

The date palms were so high that even from his elevation he could not see very distinctly what took place in the neighboring ksar. Only the roofs of the village were distinguishable, and these were crowded with natives who were firing into the streets. He observed that the forts had ceased their shelling, a sure indication that the French garrison was still holding out. A quarter of an hour, twenty minutes went by. He suddenly caught sight of a horseman in red burnous riding at breakneck speed between two rows of white walls, high up on the road connecting the two ksour. Four horsemen followed him in hot pursuit. These he soon recognized for Ouled-Sidi-Sheiks. But it was not until the first man reached the foot of the position he himself occupied that his eye

distinguished the two large gold bands of the burnous indicating the Frenchman's rank—quartermaster-sergeant in a regiment of spahis.

He bled profusely from a sabre cut in the head. Leyton hailed him in French; but he paid no heed. He was superbly mounted, and soon disappeared in the cemetery. Si-Hamza's goums came clattering along, raising clouds of white dust. One of them sprang clean over the broken cart and the dead horse, lithe as a panther, in a magnificent leap. Leyton lost sight of them for a while. Then he saw them reappear behind the belt of palms. The French soldier was gaining. A little further away, he saw the pursuers hesitate. They were being shot at. Shortly afterwards they stopped altogether and turned back, leaving the spahi to continue alone his ride towards d'Ornano's fort.

Leyton's eye followed him until he disappeared beyond a ridge. Then he noticed that d'Ornano's bastion, although enveloped in clouds of powder smoke, was no longer firing on the oasis. Bou-Amel was active again, evidently. He turned to the four corners of the compass to make sure that no Moslem troops had as yet reached the crest in an attempt to storm the forts.

He waited, feeling as forlorn as Robinson Crusoe on his desert island. The forts had ceased firing on the oasis, and quiet hung heavy on the sea of shining palm foliage which not a breath of air disturbed. While the tempest of human contest raged on the outskirts, this spot remained as smiling and fragrant as a South Sea atoll as yet undiscovered. Leyton was, for the twentieth time, asking himself what had become of the inhabitants of the ksar, when

he saw something blue and white move among the palms. It seemed a moving bundle of rags. Then it resolved itself into a young girl.

She stood stock still on the road, near the cemetery, not daring to enter the village. In a few minutes she was joined by several women and children. All started to enter the place, but only to fall back in disorder when they noticed the painter. A little boy mustered enough nerve to try another time. Another followed him, and both became much interested in the dead horse. Then all came forward.

D'Ornano's bastion, which had fired so long and so heavily, was now quiet. Only two things could have happened. Either Bou-Amel had forced the pass, or he had suffered another set-back. Shortly afterwards, the fort reopened fire on the oasis. The painter chuckled as he pictured to himself the Maddhi sitting down in his ravine, again waiting for a stroke of luck. He suddenly became aware that the fire of all bastions had shifted to the west. Looking, he saw that Moslem infantry had reached the crest and were now gushing down in the direction of the oasis. The fate of Figuig was sealed; it had become a mere question of hours.

A thundering noise of hoofs and wheels caused him to turn towards the oasis once more. On the road, field artillery came clattering along at breakneck speed, six horses to each carriage. The leaders had all they could do to manage two horses apiece and see that they were keeping proper distances, the chance of horses jumping their harness and then kicking to free themselves being wholly dependent upon the skill of the riders. The gun-

ners sat arm in arm on the seat of each carriage, afraid of a fall, their teeth set, leaving the bench each time the wheel struck a stone, painfully conscious of the fact that each gun behind them weighed two tons. The Captain commanded:

"In battery . . . halt!"

In a twinkling the guns faced the enemy; the caissons of ammunition stood upright and open; the horses were gone. Behind the caissons, the purveyors stood, holding a shell apiece, ready to pass them to the puncher. This man was kneeling near his machine, waiting to hear for what distance he was to open the fuse. The charger bridged the gap between him and the breechlock. The firer stood outside the wheels to avoid the recoil of the gun.

"At fifteen hundred yards," commanded the Captain.

The pointer came back at a run and rapidly turned a wheel. Then he withdrew, facing the firer. The sergeant raised his hand.

"Ready!"

"Ready! . . . Ready! . . . Ready!" said the three other sergeants in turn.

"Fire!"

Four detonations. The spades buried themselves in the earth. There would now be no recoil; the sliding motion of the gun on its support was without danger to the men. Pointer and firer flung themselves at their places, pulled down the shields and sat down. The Captain commanded.

"Twelve hundred yards!"

Opening the breech, the firer ejected the burnt cart-

ridge. The charger took a new shell from the hands of the puncher. Fire! It took the Captain ten seconds to judge of the result.

"Thirteen hundred yards! Continue firing!" he bel-
lowed. "Keep going, boys, and give them hell. A
hundred sous apiece to the crew of the best-served gun and
a louis to the best gunner."

The four 75mm. were belching shells at the rate of a
hundred a minute. Caisson followed caisson. The
tumult was so deafening that Leyton did not hear in-
fantry bugles blowing the "charge." The next minute,
Turcos, Zouaves and Joyeux appeared on the road and
flooded the ksar.

The painter saw them scatter in the gardens on the
outskirts of the oasis, jump from tree to tree, fire a shot
and jump again. So absorbing was the spectacle that
he did not notice that officers were entering the mosque.
He was leaning on the balustrade when a hand grasped
him by his burnous. He found himself facing three
captains and a lieutenant-colonel.

"What's the matter with you?" he protested in French.
"What do you take me for, anyway? For a cushion or
for a spy?"

The four men exchanged a look of surprise. The Lieut-
enant-Colonel ordered him to get up and asked him who
he was. Leyton gave his name, declared that he was a
painter and very wrathfully spoke of his American citizen-
ship. His outburst caused everybody to smile.

"Calm yourself," said the Lieutenant-Colonel. "A spy
may be a Nicaraguan or even Cingalese. We have them
at home; and until now I have not heard that it was

sufficient to be American to be free from guilt. What did you say your name was?"

"Leyton. George Leyton. I am a nephew of the late General de Diolie, killed six weeks ago in Marakesh."

"Oh, by Jove!" exclaimed one of the captains. "He is the man d'Ornano left in Igli, with that camel-driver."

"Or some Englishman in Abd-er-Rhaman's pay," vouchsafed the officer who had seized the painter. "It is strange that we should find him here with a dead man. Mr. Leyton can, perhaps, explain why there are only five bullets in his six-shooter?"

Leyton interrupted him furiously: "There are three men dead down-stairs," he shouted. "Do you believe me able to shoot four men with one bullet? There is also a dead horse. Go and look him over. When I find a wounded animal on the road, I claim the right to end his torture. Do you think that a spy would have waited for your coming?"

"But how did you come here and what were you doing?" asked the Lieutenant-Colonel.

"I followed Si-Hamza out of curiosity. It is to him that I owe my rescue. Major d'Ornano will tell you how he came to employ himself in my behalf. My horse was shot under me during the charge, and I found myself alone. I came here. Nothing strange in that, is there? If the business of a soldier is to fight, my business as a painter is to see the fighting. That's all I have to tell you. Mlle. de Diolie is in Figuig; so is Major d'Ornano. You can identify me easily enough."

"Very well," said the Lieutenant-Colonel. "Captain Maugis will hand you back your revolver, with our

apologies, and will take you down-stairs. I shall attend to you later on.”

Maugis made no difficulty in obeying and proffering his hand. Leyton took it. They descended and waited under the porch of the mosque. At the end of ten minutes the Lieutenant-Colonel came down. He approached absent-mindedly, a look of concern on his face. When the Captain saluted, he raised his glance.

“Oh yes,” he said, noticing Leyton. “Maugis, put this gentleman on the front seat of some automobile of the Red Cross, and give him in charge to the sergeant, with instructions to take him to the hospital, in El-Hamam Superior. If Mlle. de Diolie identifies him as her cousin, he is to go free; if not, twelve bullets and a blindfold. Not that I expect to shoot you,” he added, turning to the painter, “but I must provide against contingencies. Tell that ambulance to hurry up, Maugis! In an hour this place will be a bloody charnel, or I lose my name. Hurry up!”

Maugis brought his hand to his *kepi*, made a sign to Leyton to follow and wheeled around. On the way, the painter learned that Si-Hamza had succeeded in occupying and holding the ksar of Zenaga. But he had not since dared show himself outside the walls. Fierce fighting had taken place in the streets. The Ouled-Sidi-Sheiks, who owed their success to the rising of the native population, awaited, before pushing forward, the arrival of the infantry Abd-er-Rhaman was now sending to their support. Questioned as to whether the bastions would be able to hold, Maugis shrugged his shoulders and laughed. It would take Abd-er-Rhaman a week to occupy them, and each position would have to be stormed in turn. The

wonder was not that Figuié should fall, but that Abd-er-Rhaman should effect its capture without leaving less than one-third of his troops in the ditch.

At the northern end of the village they reached a small piazza where three automobile trucks, bearing the Red Cross of Geneva, were waiting, lined against a wall. Leyton ceased speaking, a prey to a feeling of sadness and reverence in the face of this, the other side of war, the reward of heroism. From time to time, men of the hospital corps came at a run, carrying a litter. A limp form was lifted and deposited, none too gently, in the heavy wagon, where a young surgeon gave the first aid. There were very few groans, the wounded being mostly natives. Leyton, who had seen the Aïssaoua, was not surprised. These Turcos were the brothers of the men he had seen grind glass between their teeth and dance on live coals, without desisting a second from the impassivity of fakirs.

The sergeant came to call him away from his contemplation. A ten minutes' ride took them to El-Hamam Superior.

At the hospital a mawkish smell of ethylic ether, iodoform and carbolic acid reached Leyton before he passed the threshold. He climbed the stairs and opened a door. He saw long rows of beds so close together that they almost touched. Pale faces on the pillows, dirty hands on the white sheets. The windows were open on the shady side. Green blinds were drawn tight on the other. Two men in white aprons were taking away an operating-table. A third attendant, his forefinger on the wrist of a patient, was washing a thermometer in a glass. At the far end of

the room a man screamed in agony. Leyton crossed the floor with as little noise as possible, made a gesture to call the attention of the men carrying the table, asked for Mlle. de Diolie and waited.

Save for the distant roar of cannonading, all was quiet in El-Hamam. He looked around, considerably embarrassed, conscious of the strange figure he cut in his native garments. At the other end of the room the door was opened by the sergeant, and two men entered with a litter. An elderly man with eye-glasses, whose apron was smeared with blood, followed on their footsteps like a gust of wind. Brandishing a surgical instrument of some kind, a saw, it seemed to Leyton, he thundered:

"Not here. Are you crazy, sergeant? Where do you suppose I will find room, *tonnerre de Dieu!* Take them to the Mission of the White Fathers of Figuig, and wait for Farlède." Then noticing Leyton—"Who is that pie-faced, thundering idiot over there? I have not enough to attend to, I suppose? They will send me every blooming native with a colic or a horse kick. Give him a dose of ipecacuanha and persuade him to go and shake his vermin in the street. I will have no beggars of this kind in my hospital." Here the sergeant spoke a few words in his ear. "Oh, that's all right, that's all right! . . . Apologize for me, will you; I have no time. I need Mlle. de Diolie mighty bad just now, but I'll send her directly. What's the temperature of No. 3, Jaumard?"

"One hundred and four, one-tenth," answered the attendant with the thermometer and the glass.

"Then the ice and mighty quick! What are you dreaming about?"

He went, banging the door. Considerably annoyed, Leyton turned towards the window, seeking the landscape. Ever since last night the image of d'Ornano presented itself to him far too often to leave him his peace of mind; still, this time, as on former occasions, he felt invincibly attracted by the bastion of the Wad-el-Haluf. The thought that, in a minute, he would see Gisèle filled him both with happiness and discomfort. The reason why she had decided to remain in Figuié and perform this thankless task was a puzzle he almost feared to elucidate. While listening to Si-Hamza the night before, he had felt a pang; he had envied d'Ornano the opportunity he himself had never had to rise above the common lot. An obscure premonition, little facts he now remembered, caused him to fear that his cousin had a secret in which he had no share. The thought that in a few days d'Ornano, compelled to surrender, would leave him a free field, came almost as a relief. But the next second he loathed himself for this pang of jealous anguish. At any rate, if the Corsican had sought to win, he could not accuse him of having taken an unfair advantage. He set his teeth. For weeks to come, Gisèle would be so dependent upon him that there might be still a chance to regain lost ground. God grant that in his turn he would prove an efficient protector.

"You, George! You! . . ."

She came forward with extended hands, very pale and tired, but as pretty as ever in the short sleeves and simple garb of the hospital nurse. His look was so searching that she reddened. Was her secret, then, branded on her face? It was not enough for her to suffer torture; she

must also cause suffering to another! As he probed her soul with a glance, her eyes became bright with tears. But his expression had already softened when she fell sobbing on his shoulder.

Poor Leyton! She wept over the distress the knowledge of the secret of her heart would bring him, she thought. In reality, she was recovering through the time-honored process of hysterics. The strain had been too great for her frailty. In the last two days, cannon had been roaring incessantly in the Wad-el-Haluf.

"Come," she said. "I am so glad to see you, George. We must telephone to the bastion that you are free. Major d'Ornano spoke of you only this morning."

Leyton followed her into the operating-room. She flung herself against the wall and unhooked the receiver.

"Hello!" she called. "Give me the bastion of Tarla. Yes, the Wad-el-Haluf. . . . I say Tarla's bastion. Yes, this is the hospital."

She waited. At her right, the painter was able to hear, carried by the line, the crackling of machine-guns.

"Hello, central! . . . Oh, who is this? Tarla's bastion. . . . Is this Tarla's bastion? I can't hear you. . . . Won't you speak louder, please. This is Mlle. de Diolie talking. . . . Mlle. de Diolie. . . . Oh, is that you, Lieutenant di Borgo? I am well, thank you. I wish to speak to Major d'Ornano. I hear you; but what are you complaining about? He is busy? . . . Oh, please! . . . Tell him that George is here. George Leyton, my cousin. . . . What did you say? . . . Oh! All right. Yes; you are forgiven if you tell him."

Two minutes passed.

"Major d'Ornano? Ah, at last! . . . Gisèle de Diolie, yes. George is here. . . . I say George. . . . I am very well, thank you. How do you feel? . . . No, I am not too tired. I try not to. . . . What was it you said? . . . Who? George? . . . Indeed, I don't know. He is here, that's all. I have not had time to ask him where he comes from. Do you wish to speak to him?"

She passed the receiver to Leyton. Over the wire the two men exchanged greetings. The painter gave a brief relation of his escape. Then he asked d'Ornano his opinion of the operations in progress. For two minutes the Corsican talked without interruption. Gisèle listened attentively, sometimes catching a few words, occasionally enlightened by an exclamation from the painter. Suddenly she heard a click.

"Hello," shouted Leyton. "Hello, central!" Then a pause. "Central, why do you cut me off? What's the matter, anyway? Wake up, central. Are you sleeping?"

A faint shivering voice came from the receiver.

"Sorry. The wire is cut. Nothing doing in that part of the oasis."

Gisèle became as white as her apron.

"He has blown up the fort!" she screamed. "I know he is the man to do it."

Leyton's reply was prompt and to the point.

"Damn it; he is not the man to do it while talking to me by telephone. . . . It's nothing of the kind. The wire is cut; that's all. He told me himself that Abd-er-Rhaman's troops were sweeping everything before them."

"And what did he say would become of him?"

"I guess he thinks little about it and cares a good deal

less. He says his fort can't be stormed. As he has food for three weeks, you can draw your conclusions. I wish you and I were as well off."

He had scarcely spoken when the clatter of galloping artillery made the panes tinkle. Both of them ran to the window. The battery Leyton had an hour before seen at work from the minaret of the mosque crossed the piazza and turned to the right. An accident occurred as the last caisson came to the corner. The head leader turned too short. In vain did the sergeant utter a shout of warning and bear with all his weight on the horses of the clumsy rider. The middle and back leaders were unable to resist the impulse. The front wheel struck the wall and the carriage upset completely, spilling the gunners. Fortunately, the caisson proper remained standing, and an explosion was avoided. But two out of three gunners were left unconscious on the road. As the sergeant, fearing to leave his caisson in the hands of the enemy, was unwilling to wait, it fell to the third man to take his companions to the hospital.

Leaving Gisèle, Leyton ran across the sick-room, tumbled down-stairs and hurried to the assistance of the victims. One had apparently suffered a fracture of the skull, the second complained of a broken arm. The American came back carrying the first. As he passed the threshold, infantry invaded the piazza. They were the men he had seen at work earlier in the morning. In the rear, the Joyeux who covered the retreat were still shooting. A party of perhaps a hundred men were carrying wounded comrades. Captain Maugis, with whom Leyton had had dealings of so unpleasant a nature in the mosque, was in

charge. He ordered the wounded lined against the wall, and came to Leyton with extended hand.

"You are the very man I wanted to see," he shouted. "It's all off, and Si-Hamza is on our heels. Fortunately for the wounded, I find you here. See what you can do for the Red Cross, Mr. Leyton. We can no longer protect it."

He hurried after his men. There were five minutes of heavy silence. Save for a few pigeons, which fluttered down from the palm trees, the piazza was deserted. Leyton heard steps behind him. Turning, he saw Gisèle on the stairway. Behind her came the old surgeon who had so rudely berated him. With his assistants he came down to defend his hospital.

Two men relieved Leyton of his charge. They waited. Nobody came. This unaccountable silence was even more impressive than the clamor of battle. The American inferred that street fighting in Zenaga had taught the Ouled-Sidi-Sheiks a lesson in prudence, and that they were afraid to enter the *ksar*. At last a horseman came up at a gallop, stopped his horse in full career and made a rapid survey of the surroundings. He went back and returned two minutes later. This time he was followed by a troop. Among them, Leyton recognized Si-Hamza and Mokrani.

"You can attend to the wounded," he said, turning to the surgeon. "There will be no murder or plundering."

CHAPTER XXI

THE BASTION OF THE WAD-EL-HALUF

To avoid being hit, the sergeant covered at top speed the area swept by the enemy's fire. He entered the man-hole crawfish fashion and let himself slide into the casemate. Forty men were housed in this rat-hole that was less than six feet high and not thirty feet in length, and where so little light penetrated that lanterns were burning at noon. Loaded with the pungency of antiseptics, oil and leather, the atmosphere was so hot and stifling that all the inmates were lying down, stripped to the waist, water-bottle in the right hand, in a condition of perspiring discomfort akin to the coma of malarial fever. Seeing the sergeant enter with the day's report, a man drawled:

"Here comes the *Tambour* with the 'Decision.' Who is dead again?"

"A good many more than the report will show," came the answer from the opposite corner of the casemate. "O'Hara need not have taken the trouble of picking up this one here under fire yesterday. He's cold now."

"Cold?"

"Yes; and I'll bet it's the first time in three weeks the poor devil feels anyways like comfortable. He's been too hot; that's what's the matter."

"And you not three feet from him!" came the indignant

reply. "Wake up, O'Hara! Your *marsovin* is dead! . . . Get the lantern, you blasted fool! Couldn't you have called somebody?"

"I could, maybe," the other answered sheepishly. "But I came down from sentry duty at eight o'clock this morning."

By this time O'Hara and his mates—Larry, Thomlinson, Kelly and Von Bomsen—were silently gazing at the dead boy, a nineteen-year-old Parisian with less than five months' service in a regiment of Colonial Infantry. O'Hara broke the sorrowful silence.

"Mark him down, Sergeant. We will bury him after the *kief*."

He covered the corpse with a watch coat and turned to hear the reading of the report. No guard duty for him today. Intently, he listened to the roll of casualties.. When he was sure that no bosom friend was on it, he became listless. But he grumbled as soon as he learned that a new trench had to be opened by the company. Making the dirt fly with a sun like this was no Christian occupation; and he could not see why the Moslem prisoners were not compelled to do the navvy work. Then came the reading of the "*ordre du jour*."

"In consideration of his behavior under fire while rescuing wounded comrades, private O'Hara is made a corporal . . ."

The rest he did not hear. The five members of the Anglo-Saxon Club—on account of the peculiar nature of his friendship for Thomlinson, the Boer Van Bomsen occupied in the quintet the position of an adopted son—were shaking him by the hand. Kelly, ex-delivery boy in

Baltimore, ex-beachcomber in North Africa, as a result of shanghaïing, was first in vouchsafing the opinion that the two red stripes ought to be sewed on O'Hara's coat. He instantly began rummaging through the knapsacks for the appropriate piece of madder-colored bunting. But the search was fruitless until he happened to think of the red ordnance belt worn by the dead soldier.

"Sure, he won't mind," he muttered in answer to the protest of his conscience. "If we are able to bury him whole, it is to O'Hara he owes it, anyway. And after I have taken a piece two inches wide, there will be enough of the stuff left to shroud him in."

Within ten minutes Private O'Hara, shirtless, but perspiring freely under his coat, had evolved into a corporal as naturally as a caterpillar into a butterfly. His eyes glued on his sleeve, he was following the plying of the needle, when he heard Weinshwurtz exclaim with an enormous sigh:

"Ach! There will be no wash down over this striping."

His dejection was so genuine that everybody roared. De Plassieux exclaimed with evident bad temper:

"Barely enough water to drink, and the little there is is all lime. You bet O'Hara will be licking a dead man's boots, and three feet of ground besides, before he can set up the drinks."

But the joke was little relished by the Irishman.

"You're not meaning to cast a slur on these new stripes, are you?" he inquired. "Then just you smack your tongue; for I'll find the drinks yet. Give me my shirt!"

O'Hara had declared that he would find the drinks; then, somewhere, drinks must exist. The source of the

supply being totally unknown, curiosity had far more to do with the interest that suddenly developed than the expectation of an immediate throat-wetting. De Plassieux brought the garment half-apologetically. O'Hara glared at his four satellites.

"Put on your shirts!" he shouted. Then evidently fearing that what he meant for an invitation might be mistaken for a command—his first order to subordinates—he added more softly "—and come with me."

And deaf to all requests for explanations, he attended to his own toilet. It took the five men three minutes to make ready. The Irishman was first to reach the man-hole. He stood erect in the sun.

"Well, what's happened!" he exclaimed. "Seems as if these curs down there is no longer shooting. What's up?"

His hand over his eyes, he surveyed the landscape. Around him was the chaos and desolation incident to an obstinate defence. A two weeks' bombardment had left little standing in the bastion that overlooked the Wad-el-Haluf. Explosives had knocked down the works, shrapnel had battered machine-guns and field-pieces. Unexploded shells lay half buried in the earth that covered the casemates. The sand-bags used for the protection of gunners and riflemen had been rent by fragments of shell and riddled with shot. Freshly chipped stone littered the ground. Splinters of steel and cast-iron, crushed brass fuses, flattened lead and nickel-coated bullets covered the works. Here and there were gun wheels and broken rifles. There were brown spots that had been blood. Coats and kepis lay where nobody had cared to venture to pick them up. The men on duty availed themselves of

the respite to carry the wounded to safety. O'Hara saw one of them, without as much as a quiver, wipe his hands and break, between thumb and forefinger, a piece from thehardtack another man was eating. Their rifles on their knees, these men—they belonged to the company of Colonial Infantry—were sitting on sand-bags. Not an officer was in sight.

"What's the matter?" inquired O'Hara of the trooper who was chewing.

"Don't know," came the dry reply. "Ask the man over there. And tell him to bring me some shade and a café-cognac."

Turning at the irreverent gesture, O'Hara saw d'Ornano engaged in conversation with Captain Jarchin. Both men were holding spy-glasses. Five feet behind, Capo di Borgo seemed to be awaiting orders. A dozen officers had gathered in the immediate vicinity.

When, at a word from d'Ornano, he saw them depart and join their posts, the Irishman felt that his opportunity had come to march his four friends towards the bottles, goal of his expedition. The Corsican saw them approach, stop and salute without betraying by a sign that he was ready for an audience. Instead, he called Capo di Borgo to give him instructions. Patiently O'Hara waited a quarter of an hour.

He now understood why the firing had ceased. On the slope leading to the oasis an officer with a flag of truce had appeared. He was on foot, accompanied by four *askharis* who wore the uniform of Abd-er-Rhaman's regulars. His flag-bearer was a khaïd on horseback.

The Irishman thought it strange that the messenger,

although he wore the red fez, should be dressed as a European officer. But the necessity of preserving correct military position in the presence of superiors prevented him from exchanging remarks with his friends. At this juncture d'Ornano's voice startled him.

"What is it, O'Hara?"

The hand of the Irishman went to his kepi. The presence of a Captain belonging to another arm of the service deprived him of some of his self-reliance; yet he managed to utter his request in reasonable French.

"Colonel, it's for a favor. Me and my friends. . . . You will remember the time when you was sunstruck and I made you a loan of my water-bottle, sir? . . . If I say it, it is because I was thirsty myself and I knew there was a simoom coming. Now . . ."

"I remember. Go ahead!" interrupted d'Ornano, who saw that his new corporal found it hard to recall past services. "Never mind Captain Jarchin."

"I don't mind him, sir. I'd never have reminded you without good reason. You're welcome! But to-day it's myself that's in trouble. I know I must wear these stripes with honor or be food for the buzzards. De Plassieux tells me this morning—I take my friends here to testify—'O'Hara will be licking a dead man's boots,' sez he, 'ere he can get the stuff to set up the drinks.'"

He waited. Jarchin and Capo di Borgo were smiling. D'Ornano alone kept a straight face. He inquired soberly:

"How many men are there in your casemate?"

"Forty."

"And you expect me to find drinks for forty people! . . . The fairest woman in the world can't give more than she

has.' I have a bottle of 'Curaçao' and another of 'Benedictine.' Will that do you? If you look sharp, everybody can have a mouthful."

O'Hara saluted. His hopes had risen no higher than everyday *tafia*.

"I happen to want four men just now," d'Ornano went on. "You will follow Lieutenant di Borgo outside the trenches. Go to your casemate and get your things. Van Bomsen will take charge of the bottles until the others come back."

O'Hara faced about, ordered Van Bomsen to leave the ranks and commanded: "*Garde à vous! . . . Par le flanc . . . droit! . . . Pas gymnastique en avant. . . . Marchel!*"

They reached the casemate running. Hurriedly the new Corporal inspected accoutrements and rifles. Larry, free from the cares and responsibilities belonging to rank, imparted the cheerful news. When d'Ornano again caught sight of the four men, they were ready for parade. From the casemate came a chorus:

Père Brabançon, son, son,
Payez vous la goutte? Oui, oui.
Aux sous-officiers de la gar, de la gar,
Aux sous-officiers de la garnison.
C'est la rein' Pomaré
Qui va si court vétue . . . etc. . . .

The sequel went on to relate the adventures of various rulers and to divulge the extraordinary relation that may exist between a pipe-stem and the summer apparel of a Tahitian queen. Capo di Borgo had taken the four men in hand. At the gate they met the horseman who was to

act as flag-bearer. He was the quartermaster-sergeant of spahis Leyton had watched so long from his post of observation on the day of the storming.

Abd-er-Rhaman's envoy was waiting four hundred feet lower down the slope, in full view. Held by a khaïd in scarlet coat, his flag of truce was flapping on a background of cerulean blue—the palm trees of the oasis. The rest was a cobalt sky and yellow ground rent by trenches. Not a tuft of grass. The defenders were lying low in the ditches, seeking shade behind their knapsacks.

The six men reached the outposts and gingerly surmounted the barbed-wire fences, the spahi especially experiencing trouble with his fretful animal. A little further on lay the corpses of Saharans killed so close to the trenches that their comrades had been unable to bring them in under fire. They belonged to Bou-Amel's harka; and d'Ornano had once before pitilessly refused to conclude an armistice that would profit only his foe. To-day, Capo di Borgo had orders to reject a similar proposal. If the one-eyed Maddhi wanted to bury his dead, let him begin by setting Sidi-Malik at liberty.

It soon became evident that Abd-er-Rhaman had more important business to transact than the conclusion of a few hours' armistice. His envoy was no smaller a personage than Count Palsim von Brokow, Master of the Artillery and of the Engineers.

Capo di Borgo noticed that a quarter of a mile away Moslem cavalry were waiting in good order. He questioned the spahi and was told that they were Ouled-Sidi-Sheiks. No doubt Si-Hamza and the other *shorfa* of his family had come to watch the proceedings, perhaps with the secret

intent of holding Bou-Amel in check. The six men continued to advance until no more than fifty feet separated them from the opposing party. The two envoys saluted each other.

Di Borgo gave his opponent an admiring glance. Terribly correct in his uniform, tall and blond, with the light of cold intellectuality in his eyes, Palsim von Brokow was in truth the achieved type of the German staff officer. The famous "salt of the earth" came back to the Corsican's memory. In all fairness, he was bound to concede that Kaiser Wilhelm's epithet was not so absurd when applied to a soldier of this stamp. It was a pleasure to meet such a finished representative of scientific and courteous warfare in a place like Figuig where Si-Hamza and the Sultan seemed alone to possess ethical standards.

The two officers met. Since he had been first on the ground, it was incumbent upon the German to open negotiations. Resolved not to take the initiative, di Borgo waited for him to make the necessary speech.

"I am directed by his Sherifian Highness to carry terms of surrender to Commandant d'Ornano," Palsim von Brokow began with a slow decision that was almost disdainful in its dryness. "I am, therefore, compelled to request you to lead me to him."

"Commandant d'Ornano has foreseen that such might be the purpose of your mission," came the equally curt reply. "He charges me to remind you of a military axiom: 'A place no longer adverse to the debating of terms is half taken.' As the Wad-el-Haluf can be held, he sees no necessity for entertaining propositions of any kind."

"Does he fear that I may obtain valuable information concerning the state of the defence and the layout of the trenches?" the German resumed. "We already possess the necessary data; and, moreover, I have no objection to the blindfold. Abd-er-Rhaman is well aware that ever since the day you exploded your mines on the side of the canyon the cisterns of the bastion have been leaking. The Sultan is open to terms, to-day. In a week it will be unconditional surrender; and your commander will have to reckon with the long-lived hatreds of Bou-Amel."

"Are you sure that you do not yield to a tendency to see things through the magnifying-glass of your own hopes?" di Borgo inquired in his turn. "We are inclined to believe that Abd-er-Rhaman will, in a week, be across the border, pursued by the sixty thousand French troops that are now concentrating around Mascara, Sidi-bel-Abbès and Tlemcen. If we cannot do better, we will at least keep him here until the French General Staff is ready for the offensive. For the rest, I can only remind you of the advice a knight of Tinteniach gave to a wounded friend suffering sore thirst. No doubt, you know it. It happened while a party of thirty Bretons were breaking the heads of thirty Englishmen."

"I confess that I am unacquainted with the anecdotal side of Breton history," the German replied, not without irony.

"No matter. I would not withhold, even from an enemy, what I consider useful knowledge. The advice was: 'Drink thy blood, Baumanoir. We will be through with them presently.' It dates back to 1352. Good-day, sir."

And the Corsican, extremely proud of his effect, saluted rigidly and turned on his heel. He had not gone three

steps when he heard a shot. A bullet whistled dangerously close. A second report came as the echo of the first, and he saw his flag-bearer in the dust, with his horse shot under him.

The sequel came so quickly that he was not granted a chance to interfere. The four askharis of the German had taken to their heels, two of them throwing away their rifles. The khaïd in scarlet seemed to hesitate. Then he followed at a gallop.

Kelly and Thomlinson were firing in the direction of Bou-Amel's camp. Apparently as surprised as his adversary, Palsim von Brokow had stopped. He felt O'Hara's fingers on his throat at the very moment he saw one of his askharis topple over.

Poor Larry had again made a mistake. But Capo di Borgo had no time to listen to the indignant protests of the German officer. While Kelly explained that the askharis were guiltless and that the violators of the truce belonged to Bou-Amel's harka, other actors had come on the stage. The first was Si-Hamza. His leather coorbash was now falling with pitiless regularity on the face and shoulders of the three fleeing askharis and the khaïd in scarlet. The shorfa of his family were galloping at top speed in the direction of Bou-Amel's camp. At this juncture di Borgo saw the khaïd turn back waving his flag. Si-Hamza followed him.

Pointing out that neither he nor the Sultan was responsible for the unfortunate occurrence, von Brokow renewed his protest. The threat implied in his tone provoked the Corsican, who very dryly replied that, at any rate, the French could not be accused of having begun hostilities

and that until excuses were offered and reparation made, the German might consider himself a prisoner.

However, he ordered O'Hara to relax his hold. Si-Hamza had, by this time, left the khaïd at the place he formerly occupied. He pushed his stallion towards the party and jumped to the ground.

"Before I charge you to transmit to Commandant d'Ornano the apologies of the Sultan and my own, I beseech your flag-bearer to accept the gift of my horse as a compensation for the loss he has suffered," he said. "The responsibility for this unwarranted outrage rests altogether with troops that have hereto escaped the bonds of discipline. This is only an explanation. I am aware that it cannot supply the place of an excuse. The culprits will be delivered into your hands, even if I have to set in motion the whole force of the Ouled-Sidi-Sheiks."

"I must insist on capital punishment for the offenders and that the execution be performed in the Sultan's name," di Borgo replied. "It must be made plain that it is an act of justice and not mere revengeful feeling on our part. As regards your envoy, you are, no doubt, aware that I may continue his arrest and still remain within the strict limits of the law of nations. We have been fired upon and the responsibility lies solely on your commander-in-chief. Nothing compels Abd-er-Rhaman to march against us Saharan raiders whose sole value seems to lie in their capacity for inflicting mutilation on dead soldiers."

Si-Hamza made a gesture that could be construed as a willingness on his part to waive the question of right.

"True enough," he replied. "Still the generosity of the Sultan is well known. As I offer in his name all the repara-

tion the gravity of the occurrence warrants, too much diffidence on the part of a foe will only create the impression that, by refusing his freedom to our master of the artillery, you fear that he may prove too useful."

At this broadside the Corsican reddened. He instantly turned towards Palsim von Brokow.

"When you return home to watch over your Moselle vineyards, I trust you will find me in the immediate vicinity ready to renew so pleasurable an acquaintance," he said. "You may go. Other dealings interest only Si-Hamza and myself.

The relatives of the chieftain were approaching. They were pushing forward two poor devils, pale as ashes, totally naked beneath the *shamirah* and the *akhnif*. Si-Hamza ordered one of the askharis to go and request Mokrani to send a chaouch.

Their hands tied behind their backs, the two culprits were made to kneel. Muttering prayers, they waited for the executioner with the resignation born of fatalism; for the Moslem seldom attempts to elude the justice of his chiefs. The chaouch came to report to Si-Hamza. His first care was to make the doomed men bend their heads, while he felt brutally with his thumb for the exact spot he wished to strike. This ascertained, he stuck on the neck of each victim a piece of cigarette paper. Next he tried the length of his stride and then sharpened the edge of his own blade with a yatagan. The two Saharans were still praying.

His sleeves drawn up, and standing so that he could start off the left foot, the chaouch waited for the signal.

As soon as Si-Hamza spoke, he made two steps forward.

The keen blade flashed in the sunlight. A head flew. With as calm a mien as if he were flicking away a spot of dust, Si-Hamza wiped off the drop of blood that had fallen on his *feredjeh*. Two more steps and the second man fell forward. Leisurely the chaouch wiped his blade on the *shamirah* of the last victim. He then went to lay the heads before the Frenchmen.

Kelly and Thomlinson turned green; but Larry and O'Hara were unmoved. Both had been long in the service and were familiar with ugly sights. Capo di Borgo gave the order to go back.

Firing was resumed as soon as they reëntered the fort. Abd-er-Rhaman's reply to d'Ornano's refusal to entertain his proposal of surrender was not long in coming. The bastion of Beni-Ounif was stormed in the afternoon. As Djebel Zenaga and Beni-Ounif, both built on the opposite side of the canyon, were mutually dependent, the fall of one was bound to involve the surrender of the other within a very short time. Captured guns had increased the strength of the Moslem artillery. Trenches had been pushed actively. It was, indeed, the conviction that the keys of both bastions were now in his hand that had led Abd-er-Rhaman to believe that d'Ornano was no longer in a position to reject the terms of the victor. When Palsim von Brokow came to report the fruitless result of the parley, he instantly issued the order to storm Beni-Ounif regardless of the cost.

The fierce cannonading that now began lasted until four o'clock. D'Ornano's surprise was great when, immediately afterwards, it developed that the Sultan, who to reach his goal had squandered the lives of hundreds of his own

men, was actually allowing the remnant of Beni-Ounif's garrison to make good its retreat by way of the Wad-el-Haluf. There could be but one explanation; the splendid behavior of these Turcos, and the fact that they were Moslem troops, had earned them at the last minute the clemency of a generous victor. He persisted in this illusion until it became evident that they intended to take shelter in his own fort.

He frowned and for the next few minutes did not answer a word to the questions put to him by his officers. At length, as Jarchin ventured to ask him whether he intended to receive these waifs, he exploded:

"Have the kindness to attend to your company, Captain Jarchin. I have not summoned a council of war."

The Turcos had now reached the outposts, and men in the trenches were cheering. D'Ornano left the fort. As soon as he was within speaking distance of the advancing troop, he ordered a halt.

"Where is your captain?" he inquired.

No answer. The Captain had been killed. The Lieutenant in command left his station and came forward. Before he could open his mouth, d'Ornano let loose on him the pent-up flood of his ill-humor.

"Do you take the Wad-el-Haluf for a sanatorium?"

The officer was too astounded for speech. D'Ornano went on:

"Understand this. I have twice as many men as I need, three days' food and no water. If you had come here, having compelled Abd-er-Rhaman to let you go, I would have received you and given you a chance to get killed to some purpose. As it is, I have no use for Abd-er-Rhaman's

gifts, especially when they consist of mouths to feed. If I take you, I am bound to surrender to-morrow or else turn my own men out."

The Lieutenant saluted.

"I will go back and surrender," he said. "I thought I might be of some use to you in the event of Abd-er-Rhaman deciding to storm the Wad-el-Haluf."

D'Ornano softened sensibly.

"Then you should have attempted to reach Djebel Zenaga," he said. "I don't think myself that Abd-er-Rhaman would have allowed it, but you might have tried. As they are in pressing need of help, they would have welcomed you with open arms. You understand the Sultan's scheme, don't you? He can storm Djebel Zenaga; indeed, I have every reason to believe that he will do it to-night or to-morrow morning. But he knows that if he attempts to rush matters on this side, he will leave half of his beloved infantry on the slope. Such a success is too dearly bought. He will starve us out."

The Lieutenant sighed and turned to go. D'Ornano's glance rested upon him the space of ten seconds. Then he called:

"Wait a minute, Lieutenant! I don't know but what I might. . . . Wait until I think it over."

He began pacing the ground. His cogitation lasted some time. He broke the silence once only to ask the Lieutenant for a cigarette.

"March your troops in," he said at length. "But a meal is all you can expect from me. I warn you that I am going to use you to repay Abd-er-Rhaman for his kindness. All troops not needed for the defence of the bastion will have

to find their subsistence in Bou-Amel's camp. Let me have your bugler."

He instructed the native to run into the fort and call all officers now off duty to the "Critique." He then re-entered the bastion behind the Turcos. The first man he met was Jarchin.

"I trust you will forgive me the impatient words that escaped me in a moment of perplexity," he apologized. "Kindly tell the officers that there will be a council of war."

He entered the casemate known as "Headquarters" ever since the building that had originally borne the name had fallen into heaps under the persistent cannonading of Palsim von Brokow's Krupp guns. He directed the sergeants intrusted with all clerical work relating to munitions and supplies to bring some order out of the general confusion and provide seats. Canteen boxes would very well answer the purpose. When he was satisfied with the arrangements he commanded an orderly to usher in the officers he had sent for.

CHAPTER XXII

THE SORTIE

D'Ornano had not called a council of war because of uncertainty as to the best course of action or through lack of resolution. He had decided on his tactics and he had no intention of allowing a majority of his subordinates to sway him. The council was a consultative body and nothing more. But he held that even a subaltern acts more intelligently and consequently more effectively if he has full knowledge of the plan of campaign as a whole. To-day, it was also especially necessary to consider the state of mind of the troops. The men were tired. Dysentery and enteric fever were foes they dreaded far more than the enemy himself. They not only needed water and food, but also medical supplies. Was their vitality, moral as well as physical, sufficient to stand the test of an additional and unusually strenuous effort? A garrison that has begun to look forward to capitulation has already lost morale. The arrival of the Turcos could only increase the discontent of the steadfast and enhance the hopes of the wavering. Still d'Ornano knew that the idea of a sortie proves invariably popular with men who have been kept long on the defensive. The purpose of the present gathering was therefore to discuss how confidence might best be restored and enthusiasm kept at the boiling point until it was possible to act.

He began by recalling the main events of the defence. No sacrifice had been useless, since Figuig had kept Abd-er-Rhaman in check a longer time than was necessary for the French to land in Algeria the much-needed metropolitan troops. He then proceeded to give a faithful outline of the present state of affairs. The straits they were in compelled the officer in command to ask his fellow-officers to express their view of the situation with all frankness. They were reminded that the man on whose shoulders the responsibility rested could be served only by the untarnished truth.

Captain Jarchin came last. His higher rank and longer experience warranted on his part greater freedom and bluntness. Alone, he dared to criticise. His conviction was that the defence, still possible an hour ago, had been set at naught by the introduction of additional troops. D'Ornano had been waiting for this. He got up.

"Let me thank Captain Jarchin for having undertaken to voice an apprehension which all of you must have conceived," he said. "I have long been aware that a time would come when the lack of water and food would compel surrender. Nobody doubts that Abd-er-Rhaman, when allowing a whole company of Turcos to make good their retreat on the bastion, sought only to hasten the unavoidable end. To-night, to-morrow morning at the latest, if I am to judge from the rapidity with which the enemy has been pushing the digging of his trenches, Djebel Zenaga will share the fate of Beni-Ounif. It is then possible, and even probable, that the company of Joyeux garrisoning that fort will be allowed to join us.

"I do not propose to wait. Better than Djebel Zenaga,

we are able to watch day by day, hour by hour, the progress of the Moslems. As this gathering breaks up, I intend to signal to our friends across the canyon that their fate is sealed. Mistake, will you say. It was also a mistake to harbor the Turcos of Beni-Ounif.

"Like their fellow-soldiers, the Joyeux will benefit by the help we are still able to extend. Since Abd-er-Rhaman will not gratify our wishes and rush his infantry to the storming of the position we occupy, we shall do the attacking. The Sultan sought to increase our difficulties. He will have only provided us with the means of making a sortie. Humiliated this afternoon by Si-Hamza, Bou-Amel will not lend his help against Djebel Zenaga. This is plainly written in the present aspect of his camp; and, moreover, we know only too well that he has set his heart solely upon avenging on us the death of thousands of his men. I propose, therefore, to go to Bou-Amel's camp for water and food. A sharp attack in the rear of the Moslem infantry will enable us to join hands with Djebel-Zenaga and will perhaps result in the capture of all Abd-er-Rhaman's guns. Nothing then will prevent us from putting the disorder to profit and rushing the Turcos to the looting of Bou-Amel's baggage. With the bastion firing over our heads, we are assured that the Sultan's army, slow to put in motion at all times, surprised in the dead of the night, will not be prepared for a concerted action before we are ourselves ready to withdraw with our plunder. This is what I want you to tell the men."

Followed precise instructions. All gunners would remain at their posts. The sick and convalescent—in short, all those who were not fit to take part in a bayonet rush,

were to be left to defend the fort. The officers were requested to see personally that all weapons were in good condition and that the regulation amount of ammunition was distributed. No knapsacks would be taken. All the men now on the sick-list must instantly take the place of their comrades in the trenches, who would thus be given a chance to get some sleep. Just before the start all troops would be fed and would receive, for the first time in a week, a double ration of coffee and a sufficient allowance of water. To delude the enemy the buglers would be instructed to make the usual calls at the usual hours.

D'Ornano spent the rest of the afternoon in the signal station directing the operator. It took almost until nightfall before a perfect understanding was reached with Djebel Zenaga. At the hour when Figui, under the sky of coral pink, slowly sank in the wave of blue that swept from the east over the dead plains, the Corsican's last glance was for the hospital.

He knew not what the coming night held in store for him. Failure or immortality of a kind—the sort that consists in snatching from the hands of the blind divinity, LUCK, the laurels that will be worn by brothers in arms—left little chance to the lover. Seldom, if ever, had he entertained any delusions about the eternity of human grief. If Gisèle de Diolie learned to-morrow that the man who had saved her from falling into the hands of the “Forsaken of God” was dead, what would be her attitude? Leyton would receive her confidences, and it would hurt his feelings. He would be the witness of her sorrow, and this also would hurt. But, in the end, he would still be alive when he, d'Ornano, would have become a remem-

brance, a sublimated memory, perhaps, with none of the failings he actually possessed; but something faint, afar off, a sun that would have shot higher in the realm of the Empyrean and become a twinkling star. And what would favor the chances of the artist all the more was precisely the fact that he was a friend, that he would experience a genuine sorrow of his own, that, in his generosity, he would be the first in making for the young woman a d'Ornano so much larger than natural size that Gisèle would soon be awed by the proportions of her idol. The day she would be brought to realize that her devotion was too human for a demi-god, she would marry a mere man—but a man.

Fortunately for the Corsican, he had too much to do to indulge in psychological divagations prompted by everyday jealousy—and jealousy without grounds. He knew what shape the thoughts of his soldiers would take after nightfall. The ghost of Death is wont to keep in close touch with bivouac fires. Once the troops were ready and everything was cleared for action, there would be one long, terrible wait. The strongest muscles would shake. A good half of those who were marked for the slaughter would have forebodings of their end and the dejected would lie down in dumb despair. Abd-er-Rhaman knew this. He could be trusted to make the moral agony of the troops defending Djebel Zenaga last as long as was wise. Then, by three in the morning, at the hour when vitality runs lowest, he would launch against the unnerved defenders of the bastion fresh troops rested by a night's sleep. In his calculations he had merely overlooked that his foe would choose eleven o'clock for a counter-attack and would fall upon him when the majority of his troops were asleep.

D'Ornano spent the next two hours interviewing and cheering the men. At ten o'clock, he gave Capo di Borgo a list of a hundred names, explaining that the bearers, all picked soldiers, would be kept in reserve until he, d'Ornano, took them in hand and led them personally to the capture of the guns. After a rapid perusal, the Lieutenant raised his eyebrows in mute interrogation.

"What's the matter?" asked d'Ornano.

"I think it is strange that you should have included every man in the fourth casemate," came the reply. "Of course I do not mean to criticise. I ask the question solely for the profit I may derive from the answer. If I may speak freely, I will say that you were right in choosing O'Hara and his squad. De Plassieux, Vouravief, Etchegarray are also excellent soldiers, and there are two or three more like them lower down the list. What I would like to know is why, on a basis of equality of merit, you have chosen to take the balance of the forty."

"Why? . . . And what of the bottles I gave away this afternoon?" the Corsican retorted. "I insist upon getting the worth of them, and I am inclined to take the view that I will get better work from fellows who are now convinced that, whenever it can be managed, I am not above treating a corporal like a personal friend. O'Hara, for one, will set the pace. You may be sure that the others will follow to a man. There will be just enough rivalry among the detachments to assure me that my team will pull as no other team ever pulled before. Bear in mind that, notwithstanding all that has been written to the contrary, a soldier is not a chess-piece. You yourself would not do the work you are doing if, all things being equal, the man

in command bore the name Coëtlochan de Kervarec instead of Colonna d'Ornano. Now about face. We start in half an hour."

When the Lieutenant was gone, he spent ten minutes leaning on the table, lost in the study of a topographical map. Then he ordered a sergeant to go in search of Captain Jarchin.

"Are you ready?" he inquired as soon as the officer stood in his presence. "Then we won't delay the move any longer. The first point we must gain consists in reaching the bottom of the slope without giving rise to suspicion. You will start right now with your company of Colonial Infantry. The Turcos will follow you under your direct command. These troops must proceed in small groups and keep hidden in the trenches until you reach the outposts. You will then advance '*en tirailleurs*,' ten at a time, and, no matter who is hit, you must not fire a shot. I remind you that, in Plevna, the Russians did better still and stifled their groans. When you have gained the position shown here, you will wait for orders. Here is the scheme of the triangular formation we will adopt. You occupy apex B, in direct contact with Bou-Amel. Apex A faces Djebel-Zenaga and C the Sultan's artillery. We have thus a wedge which the reserve, in a position such that it can hurry to your assistance in the event of unforeseen difficulties, will hammer from the centre of the triangle. The minute we join hands with the Joyeux, you will enter Bou-Amel's camp. Be careful that your colonial troops bear the brunt of the bayonet rush; but let the natives do the plundering, for they are experts at the work. When I launch the reserve in C,

the troops massed in A, strengthened by the Joyeux, will fall back on the centre of the triangle so as to present a compact mass to the return stroke of Abd-er-Rhaman's infantry. You and I will then be at the wings, with no reserve or rear-guard. Still, so long as you are not told of my death, attend solely to getting away with your plunder. I will send Capo di Borgo to the rear-guard as soon as I have got those guns."

Jarchin left the casemate, and the Corsican went in search of the non-commissioned officers who were to serve as estaffettes. The plan of operations having been summarily explained to them, they were told what to do in the event of the commander being killed or disabled, and what orders to issue in his name pending the assuming of authority by Captain Jarchin. This done, he went to join the hundred men Capo di Borgo had gone to pick.

Occasional shooting had already warned him that the enemy's sentries were aware that all was not right at the outposts. Still their firing had not reached enough volume to warrant the opinion that Bou-Amel had begun to suspect that a move of some kind was directed against him. As soon as it became evident that Jarchin was master of the position he had been commissioned to capture, the troops now lying in the trenches were ordered to move forward. The diversion made on the right would enable them to take their position at the head of the triangle without great loss. Instructing an estaffette to direct the movement, d'Ornano himself set in motion the troops that were to constitute the left wing. Speed had become the great factor for the success of this movement. The trenches were not used. When they reached the outposts, they gradually accelerated

the pace until it became a run. The quartermaster-sergeant of Spahis, the only mounted man in the garrison, was then instructed to carry the order to move towards Djebel-Zenaga at top speed. Violent firing breaking of a sudden on the slopes of the opposite bastion told the Corsican that the Joyeux were moving in the direction of the enemy's trenches. At this juncture he was informed that the fighting in A had become a hand-to-hand struggle.

For a minute, ready to launch his reserve, he was kept in suspense. Then he heard cheering.

The field-guns of the Sultan were now belching shrapnel. He profited by the short time the search-light of the fort rested upon him to look at his body-guard. O'Hara had some blood on his cheek and on the left hand. Like his comrades, however, he still stood at attention, his rifle on the shoulder. If anything was calculated to gratify a commander, it was the behavior of these men idly waiting for the bullets without betraying alarm or impatience. Capo di Borgo and his troop had already gone. There were still a few seconds to spare. He asked the Irishman if he was hurt.

The answer was lost in the roar of fierce cannonading. Palsim von Brokow had become aware that his artillery was one of the goals of the sortie. Capo di Borgo was now bearing all the brunt of his fire.

The Corsican drew his sword.

"Children, get me those guns!" he shouted. "There is nothing to do but kill. I have no use for prisoners!"

The search-light was now marking the goal. In the pitch darkness the bayonets shone with a phosphorescent light. They passed over the men of Capo di Borgo, who

had lain down to avoid being mowed down. Aiming at the destruction of this troop, the guns were now firing too low. Before the pointing had been rectified, d'Ornano was on the gunners.

Sped by a revolver, a bullet grazed his hand. When he turned at the report, it was too late for him to save the life of the marksman. Through the carefully trimmed beard, O'Hara's bayonet had found a throat. Palsim von Brokow had fallen on one of his field-pieces.

The Corsican removed his kepi and for ten seconds gazed at the prostrate form. No doubt O'Hara read the mute reproof in his glance. He wiped his bayonet and vouchsafed:

"He'd have done it to you, sir."

D'Ornano requested him to lend him his military medal until they were back in the bastion where he could give him another. Extremely puzzled, the Irishman handed him the star which a private commonly earns for gallantry, but which an officer never receives until the end of his career or before he has uncommonly distinguished himself.

Kneeling, the Corsican pinned the decoration on the breast of his foe. Then he raised himself and said:

"And now we are free to attend to Bou-Amel!"

CHAPTER XXIII

HANDS IN THE SALT

This was the fourth day of his torment. Now frantic from extreme suffering, Sidi-Malik was cursing his jailer for having again refused to cut open the goat-leather gloves imprisoning his swollen fists. He had swooned once. Knowing that losses of consciousness would now succeed each other at shortening intervals, and that lockjaw would soon declare itself, he passed alternately from supplications to threats, promising treasures he had never possessed in exchange for freedom or a mere alleviation of suffering.

Two days before he had been brought into Figuig, leaving the caves of the Zousfana, where Bou-Amel judged that spies had become too numerous. He had been transferred to this jail, a subterranean oubliette built under the cells occupied by lesser criminals. A special guardian had been allotted him. The man had been instructed to give him very little food and not enough water to quench his thirst; a fiendish precaution designed to foster the maximum of suffering while keeping the victim alive and sensitive. Sidi-Malik would die; but he would die conscious, and the very intensity of the pain he endured would kill him. Four cuts had been made with a knife in the palm of each hand; a handful of salt had been laid on the wounds, and the fists had been closed in such a

way that the tip of a finger was introduced into each cut. A leather glove, sewn while still wet, had so tightened by drying that it was impossible to move the fingers, whose nails were now growing through the raw flesh. Such is the reward Moghrabis hold in reserve for the man guilty of sacrilege, the spy and the bandit.

The cell where he lay was large, dark and extremely filthy, carpeted with mouldy straw and strewn with pieces of earthenware. Light came in by a peep-hole cut in the wall to enable the warden to keep an eye on his prisoners. In the morning hours, when the sun fell full upon the stairway leading to the court-yard, the dungeon received by this wicket light sufficient to enable the guardian to see into the remotest corner; but after twelve o'clock it took a prisoner's eyes to pierce the mystery of this mildewed and vermin-breeding darkness.

The fifth day of his torment was soon to begin, and yet the camel-driver had not abandoned all hope. Aware that Leyton was at last a free man—Anoun-Dialo had given a narrative of the American's escape—Sidi-Malik fully trusted to the devotion of his friend. But he was also aware that there were high walls around the court-yard; that Bou-Amel had two hundred men on duty in the kasbah, and that death was unavoidable unless rescue came within forty-eight hours. He had tried to win over the jailer and had failed. It was not that the keeper was inhuman, or even faithful to his master. But he was afraid. Whatever was accomplished must be without his help.

On his knees and elbows the camel-driver crawled towards the corner where he still kept a few figs. He fed like a beast, his face deep in the straw. Then he lay still.

Provided he remained perfectly quiet, he was still able to sleep a few minutes at a time; as long as sharp pains in his armpits did not come to remind him that the time was fast approaching when he would be no longer able to sleep at all. Fortunately, he had foreseen what punishment lay in store for him. His nails had previously been long and badly tended, as is usual with natives. He had bitten them off on his way to the camp of Bou-Amel and had been careful to keep them short. To this precaution he undoubtedly owed that he was still alive. It was now perhaps seven o'clock; his cell had suddenly become so dark that he surmised that the sun was setting. He soon fell into slumber.

His rest was disturbed by nightmares. Occasional pains caused him to groan and change sides. The snoring of tom-toms and derbukkhas awoke him two hours later. A dim red flickering light entered his cell by the jailer's wicket. This, he thought, proceeded either from a bon-fire lighted in honor of victory or from torches burning in the court-yard, not far from the head of the stairs. The music indicated that some sort of festive celebration, a dance, or perhaps a snake-charming exhibition, was about to take place. Not unlikely, Bou-Amel's guards, weary of the sight of bare walls, had profited by an absence of the Maddhi to introduce Ouled-Nails within the precincts of the kasbah.

On his knees and elbows Sidi-Malik crawled towards the peep-hole. He already knew that his jailer was not sitting in his customary place. In the passageway between the cell and the stairs no silhouette interposed itself between the wicket and the lighted face of the opposite wall. This wicket was just large enough to allow a head to pass

through. Surmising that his keeper had gone to join the merry crowd now collected around the performers, he resolved to have a look outside, and see if, by any chance, he could not contrive some means of escape. He approached the peep-hole cautiously and noiselessly. Aware that a mistake would swiftly meet with its reward—a matrack blow on his skull already bursting from fever—he made sure, by looking to right and left, that nobody stood near the door. Then he passed his head through and looked towards the stairs.

What he saw in the passage made him withdraw his head so quickly that he knocked his chin against the side of the partition. There were two human forms outside. One, limp, fallen in a kneeling position, the head lifted and the back against the wall, was, or had been, his jailer. The face was blotched; the eyes bulged out of their sockets; the bowstring with which the strangling had been accomplished was still tight around the swollen neck. The other was that of a man leaning against the door of the cell, a motionless silhouette interposed between the wicket and the source of light. As the unknown faced the stairway, Sidi-Malik had seen only the mere outline of a naked body, a black shadow standing in strong relief against the red glare of torches. He appeared to be a man of middle height. Presumably he was the strangler.

Trembling from fever, fear and hope, too shaky to stand, Sidi-Malik sat down to think. He had retreated so rapidly that he was still in the dark touching the nature of the performance about to take place. He made the survey of his chances. If the performers were dancing girls, they had not come for him. If they were snake-charmers,

they might have been sent by Si-Hamza. If they were Aïssaoua. . . . A cold sweat ran down his back. Shaking violently, he got up to take a second look.

The corpse so fascinated him that he found it hard to remove his glance. Among other shortcomings, Sidi-Malik had that of practising very seldom forgiveness of injuries. When he looked towards the stairs, he saw that the naked man still kept his original posture. Although people stood too near the stairway to allow his glance to penetrate within the lighted circle, he could now see that the glow proceeded from torches, its flickering being of too complex a nature to warrant the hypothesis of a bon-fire. He did not have to wait long to ascertain who the performers were. What began in a whisper soon grew into the lullaby uttered by Aïssaoua when dancing hand in hand. Shortly afterwards he heard raging yells. The hysterical fakirs, barking like famished dogs, were going into convulsions. His heart leapt. Wild hope, the promise of a life he had thought forfeited, shook him from head to foot. But a keener suffering was just about to commence. He, who had waited four days for the coming of this minute, could now scarcely muster enough patience to await the opening of this horrible door.

Waiting thus, with tense nerves, was as much as he could endure without yielding to the temptation of howling. Caught between the realization of the torment he suffered in this rat-hole and the promise of rest and sunshine, he felt that he was going mad; the thought that perhaps this hope would prove illusory being especially disheartening. For half an hour the man at the door kept his extraordinary immobility. Then Sidi-Malik heard a guttural exclama-

tion. This must have been a signal of some sort, for the Aïssaoui turned about and faced him.

Again Sidi-Malik retreated inside his cell, holding his breath, motionless, his heart beating a prodigious tattoo against his ribs. He waited for the grating of a key in the lock. But he was again doomed to disappointment. The figure in the passage moved rapidly towards the wicket. Sidi-Malik thought he was about to speak; but the Aïssaoui contented himself with picking up the body of the jailer.

So great was the sufferer's excitement that he attempted to speak and could not. A minute later the door of his cell opened. The Aïssaoui threw the corpse on the straw and began feeling his way in the darkness. No doubt he expected to find Sidi-Malik either in a sleeping or a fainting condition, for he leapt back when he heard him move. The camel-driver caught the flash of a flissa.

"Who is there?" came the voice of the unknown in a guarded whisper.

"Sidi-Malik, son of Hachem," the camel-driver contrived to reply. "Who art thou, and who sends thee? Sidi Leïtoun?"

"Sidi Leïtoun and Si-Hamza. I am the man who brought thee food Tuesday. My name is Muhamed, son of Khadour."

"Blessings be given to thee for the pity extended to the sufferer, Muhamed-ben-Khadour." Sidi-Malik replied. "Thy father was wise. May our Lord Muhamed anoint his head with perfumed oil. What am I to expect from thee?"

"Freedom, Inshallah! if thou art silent. Come to the light."



Sidi-Malik complied with the summons. Near the door, in the dim reflected light, the Aïssaoui split the gloves with his knife. When his fingers, so long imprisoned, were at last extended, the camel-driver experienced an excruciating pain. However, he succeeded in stifling a shriek.

"Thou wilt be an Aïssaoui to-night," said the rescuer in way of explanation. "Undress!"

Sidi-Malik divested himself, not sorry to get rid of his vermin. Then without soap, with a dull knife, and so hurriedly that he cut him several times, the Aïssaoui shaved him. The emergency Figaro commented in a reassuring tone:

"Since thou art an Aïssaoui, blood is the best of disguises. I shall cut thee some more. It will also relieve pain. Blood is pollution itself when the hands have been long in the salt. Come nearer!"

Soon afterwards, locking the door, he pushed the bleeding man through the passage. Disfigured by a multitude of small cuts, Sidi-Malik painfully ascended the stairs. They made their way through the crowd, if not unnoticed at least unrecognized. Muhamed made for the gate. The unsuspecting sentry allowed them to pass. They were out; the Aïssaoui began to run.

Sidi-Malik attempted to follow. But he was so weak that after two hundred yards he stumbled and fell flat on his face. Covered with blood and dust, he was, indeed, a sorry sight. Knowing that they were not yet far enough from Bou-Amel's kasbah to tarry long, Muhamed gave vent to an exclamation of annoyance. But help was now to be had. He ran swiftly for five hundred steps. Turning a corner, he signalled to his accomplices by means of a shrill and strangely modulated whistle.

He ran back. During his absence, Sidi-Malik had staggered to his feet. He was now leaning against a low wall, in the thick shadow of overhanging vines. They waited. Suddenly they heard the noise of galloping horses, and Leyton and Si-Hamza, followed by some chaouchs, came clattering along. Both of them had their revolvers cocked and raised. They had come prepared for some affray, and they saw with surprise that the path before them was free from obstacles. Sidi-Malik and his rescuer were so inconspicuous that they nearly ran past. A shout from the Aïssaoui stopped them.

"Why didst thou call, Muhamed?" asked Si-Hamza. "Has there been a fight? Where is the son of Hachem?"

Sidi-Malik, so covered with blood and dirt that Leyton would never have recognized him, was already prostrate in the dust, sobbing and kissing the horses' hoofs. Leyton alighted. Catching hold of the camel-driver under the arms, he raised him. His exclamation drew the attention of Si-Hamza.

"Bismillah!" ejaculated the chieftain. "Whose work is this, Muhamed, son of a dog? Who cut him?"

"Oh, Sidi, *ya* Sidi," sobbed Sidi-Malik, "Muhamed did well and deserves only praise. The cuts are not deep, Protector of the Poor. I was dead; thou comest, and, behold, again I am alive. My hands truly hurt me; and the glands of my armpits are much swollen; but Muhamed only gave flow to the bad blood. Look at my hands, Sidi! Feel them! Do they not look meskeen? . . . Let us go now and get the help of the *hakim*, if such is thy pleasure, for, truly, I am very sick."

"Canst thou ride?" asked Si-Hamza. "We will find a

French doctor in my house. It is not far away. Shall I take thee to him, or art thou afraid of Christian hakims?"

"I am not afraid, Sidi. Yes, let it be a Nazarene; they know much in matters of life and death. I can ride. It was also a Christian hakim who took care of me when I had small-pox and healed me. Let us go now, if it pleases thy reverence. Bou-Amel's men might come and I am too weak to fight."

Leyton helped him to his own saddle and borrowed the horse of a chaouch. A speedy run through Figuig's huerta began. They were going to El-Maiz Inferior, where Si-Hamza had his headquarters. All was quiet and fragrant under the stars. For a while they galloped along a road built through the thick of a forest of palms interlaced by a tangle of canals. All at once, Sidi-Malik noticed something like a falling star crossing the sky overhead. Almost simultaneously, he heard the detonation of a gun and the drier report of a bursting shell. He was startled. But before he could speak another star crossed the heavens.

"Allah Kerim!" he exclaimed. "Mother of Bebee-Miriam, what is this?"

Leyton and Si-Hamza were intently looking towards d'Ornano's bastion. The painter answered in French:

"It is d'Ornano. He must have repaired and remounted his guns."

"*Ya illah!* Is Sidi d'Ornano still holding out?"

Leyton chuckled. "Four bastions are still holding," he replied. "See. Here comes another shell." Then in another tone of voice: "Goodness! What's the matter?"

Beni-Ounif, Djebel-Zenaga and Wad-el-Haluf seem to be firing on Djebel-Hamam."

Si-Hamza had reined his horse. The three of them remained still on the road, with the chaouchs at a distance. The guns of the three bastions were now booming.

"A night attack," declared the chieftain. "Gun-fire is sweeping our trenches; but, for all that, I fear it's all over with Djebel-Hamam."

He explained that the trenches had been pushed in that direction, and that everything was now ready for a storming. If Djebel-Hamam fell, it meant the capture of General Pluvigné, perhaps surrender. Leyton asked him if the commanders of the three remaining bastions would be bound by the word of a prisoner of war. Si-Hamza admitted that they would not. A prisoner is no longer a chief and cannot insure obedience. As they spoke, the fire attained its maximum intensity. This fierce cannonading lasted ten minutes. Leyton exclaimed of a sudden:

"Look, by Jove! Look! Is this what you call a surrender?"

A tremor of the ground had been followed by an immense cloud of dust. The northern stars disappeared. The search-lights of Djebel-Zenaga and of Wad-el-Haluf, hesitated, and jumped from right to left, carefully searching the hillside. Slowly, the cloud settled on a heap of ruins. Djebel-Hamam had buried its defenders.

Si-Hamza gave rein and made his horse feel the spur. They covered a mile in mournful silence. Leyton asked the chieftain how long he supposed the other bastions would hold out.

"Beni-Ounif and Djebel-Zenaga will go three days," came the reply. "Wad-el-Haluf a week at the most. "There will be no storming on that side. It is rock, and trenches can't be opened. A direct assault all along the accessible slope can't be thought of; we have already lost enough men against those barbed-wire fences."

"Then I don't see how you are going to manage," interrupted the American. "D'Ornano told me four days ago that he had food for three weeks."

"He did not know then that his cisterns were leaking. We can't stay here until the call of Judgment, you understand. We are losing time; and every day spent in Figuig gives a new regiment to the Nineteenth Army Corps." He added more calmly after a pause, "Not that I wish harm to d'Ornano. He was '*mon ancien*' at the Academy, and I would go far to help him out. But I took a hand in this game, and I insist upon pulling out with a whole skin. Figuig was given me. So far, so good. Only I begin to wonder whether I have not made a fool's bargain. Surely, what is left of the oasis is not worth the loss of five thousand of my men."

Leyton made no answer to this platonic regret. Like Si-Hamza, he had his grudge against d'Ornano; and, like him, he found it impossible to foster bad feelings against a man of this stamp. He gave all his attention to Sidi-Malik, who had begun to complain of the long ride. Here was consolation. It was good to have Sidi-Malik again at his side; meskeen Sidi-Malik, bloody, dusty, naked Sidi-Malik, whose weary face was flushed with fever and whose arms were swollen from the finger nails to the shoulders. The poor fellow, unable to handle the

reins, guided his horse with the knee, his gymnastics in the high saddle forcibly reminding the painter of the mimicry of a monkey bleeding after an escape accomplished through broken glass.

They were entering El-Maïz Inferior. In two minutes they reached the house Si-Hamza had chosen for his quarters. Assistant-Surgeon Farlède was in attendance. Before he could utter a protest, the bewildered Sidi-Malik was plunged into a weak solution of bichloride, thoroughly washed and placed upon the operating-table. Farlède had fully expected the necessity of amputation. But Sidi-Malik's foresight, in chewing his finger nails, had done much to minimize the danger of blood-poisoning. The handful of salt had done the rest. Irritation alone was responsible for the swollen condition of the glands; and this would subside after two or three days' rest. The sufferer was coated with iodoform, properly bandaged and put to bed. He slept until ten the next morning.

A few minutes before he awoke, Si-Hamza received a letter. It was from Djeilma. Leyton, returning from his morning call to the hospital, was just entering the house. The young sheikh translated the message. It read:

"There is no God but God. This is to bring to thy knowledge, Si-Hamza, that Sidi-Malik has been communicated with. But a curse is upon this undertaking and I can do nothing else. I entered Bou-Amel's harem under the disguise of a fortune-teller to see whether I could not decide some of the servants to help us. A eunuch recognized me. His name is Mustapha, and in Muley-Hassan's time he was grand eunuch in the Kasbah of Marakesh. Sidi Leitoun will tell thee how it came about that Sidi-Malik robbed him of all his goods. Now he seeks his revenge and keeps me a prisoner in the harem."

"Of all things!" laughed the American. "Henceforth, when anybody denies before me the existence of immanent justice, I will tell him the story of Djeilma. The trouble is that you never know when she tells the truth and when she lies. In doubt we may safely assume the latter. Suppose we tell Sidi-Malik. He may be able to enlighten us."

Si-Hamza gave his assent. They entered the camel-driver's room. At the first words from the painter, Sidi-Malik began to swear like a pagan, binding himself by oath to take the trail after Djeilma as soon as he would be able. In the thick of his vituperation, Muhamed-ben-Khadour, the Aïssaoui who, the night before, had rescued the camel-driver, made his entrance. Sidi-Malik turned to him. In a few words, he furnished him with a description of the man who could throw light upon the mystery of Djeilma's disappearance.

"Watch for the one-eyed M'zabite who always makes the tale of the two camels follow that of the *khames* and the man-donkey who insulted his mother," he said. "He calls the *khames* Bradett. The eye he lost is the left eye. He is himself a *khoun* of the Derbaa fraternity, white-bearded, with only four toes to his left foot. One of his beads is blood-red; three of them are green; five are lacking. He also has in his possession a Spanish knife with a broken blade, and a drinking-cup made of tin, which he stole from a French soldier."

This was all. The name of the man he did not know and his tattooing was of too common a pattern to warrant description. But Muhamed-ben-Khadour knew now all that was necessary. Presumably, he had a number of

stool-pigeons ready to take the trail, for he salaamed and disappeared, binding himself by oath to locate and produce the M'zabite within four days. The camel-driver went back to sleep.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE HONORS OF WAR

The two following days were comparatively uneventful. Leyton spent most of his time at Gisèle's side, in the hospital. The girl, evidently at the limit of her endurance, went on with her task with a mournful look and a drawn face. Despite the fact that wounded men now occupied every inch of the available space and were often laid under the beds, she steadfastly refused the help her cousin proffered many times; reminding him that there were male attendants to do the heavy work. But five minutes later he would find her carrying a wounded man, and he would learn that she had vainly requested assistance. It was all too evident that, in the accomplishment of her task, she sought to relieve a mortal anguish. The painter had little difficulty in guessing the cause of her absent-mindedness. Too often he caught her at the window, intently looking towards the Wad-el-Haluf, not to realize that the thoughts of her days and nights were equally a nightmare, and that the image she had constantly before her eyes was that of a human form torn by shrapnel.

When he surprised her in this attitude, she invariably flushed and walked away. Gone forever the days when they exchanged confidences. She had little to say at all

times, and she became almost angry the day he proposed to take her for a ride. All at once, she had developed all the unconscious injustice and cruelty of the real woman. Once she had answered to his questioning that she fully intended to remain sole mistress of her thoughts. Another time she had protested that too long he had treated her as his own, and that his constant visits made her an object of gossip among the wounded and attendants. Yet a few minutes later she begged his pardon, almost tearfully, and ended by promising that, provided Surgeon Dugon gave her leave to go, she would take a ride with him in the morning.

Thus it happened that Leyton went back to El-Maïz Inferior half thankful, half furious. Jealous of d'Ornano he undoubtedly was. Yet the thought that on the morrow he would steal a march on his rival shore this feeling of some of its bitterness. He found Sidi-Malik sitting up and doing well. That evening, Si-Hamza came back early from headquarters. After dinner he proposed a game of cards. They played until ten o'clock.

Leyton slept soundly, so soundly that he was not even awakened by the roar of artillery. A week of constant cannonading had rendered him indifferent to all noises. Moreover, the theatre of the contest was situated at the other extremity of the oasis. At about three o'clock he was awakened by Si-Hamza.

"What do you suppose d'Ornano has done now?" were the young chief's first words. "At midnight, when our troops were all asleep in the trenches, Djebel-Zenaga and Wad-el-Haluf made a simultaneous sortie. D'Ornano kicked Bou-Amel's camp all upside down. He went

clear through, put everybody in the way to the bayonet, joined hands with Djebel-Zenaga and made good his retreat on Wad-el-Haluf."

"Then Djebel-Zenaga has been abandoned?" questioned the painter.

"Abandoned? Damn it! We have got the four walls. They captured five of our guns, almost all of our ammunition, food, everything. Bou-Amel is weeping like a woman. Five thousand killed, he says; and I don't know how many are lying in heaps in the trenches. We occupy the bastion, all right. But d'Ornano has food for a month, all the guns he can handle and over eight hundred men. It is an impossible situation."

"Impossible! . . . It all depends on what you can do to end it."

"Abd-er-Rhaman is thinking, I suppose. Are you coming? I want to see the havoc."

Leyton complied with his request. At five o'clock, as they were returning from their visit, they witnessed the first results of the night's affray. D'Ornano had now projectiles to spare. One by one, he began to lay in ashes all the villages in the oasis.

None better than Sidi-Malik experienced the effect of this sudden change of fortune. At six o'clock he was awakened by a terrific explosion, some plaster falling on his face and a pandemonium of yells following close upon the blast. One of d'Ornano's shells had burst near by, knocking down one of the walls of the house, shaking the whole to its foundations, killing one man outright and slightly wounding two others. Sidi-Malik was not hurt. But, unacquainted as he was with the effects of melinite

shells, he tumbled out of bed and ran yelling into the street. At the corner, while watching the burning wreckage, he recovered enough presence of mind to ask questions. El-Maïz Inferior was within range, that was all. Another shell fell and exploded in the immediate vicinity. His spirits again dropping to a low ebb, thinking that this was beastly inconsiderate on the part of a friend, the camel-driver resumed his flight.

He had not gone far when he ran into Leyton, Anoun-Dialo and Si-Hamza. From the minaret of the near-by mosque the three men had witnessed the explosion of the first shell. Anxious to ascertain the extent of the damage, they had taken the shortest road to the street. Leyton and Anoun-Dialo undertook to remove the wounded man to a safer location. The painter spoke of the hospital. Si-Hamza left them to run to headquarters.

Horses were saddled. They reached El-Hamam ten minutes later and Sidi-Malik was again put into bed. Anoun-Dialo took charge of the installation and was not interfered with. Leyton explained to Gisèle and to the two surgeons the change for the better which had taken place in d'Ornano's affairs. The young woman was not ready for her ride, but she promised to go a little later. The painter dared not insist. He merely gave the head surgeon the most positive assurances that unless he compelled his nurse to take more out-door exercise he would not profit long by her services. Dugon observed bluntly that since she had had good news from the Wad-el-Haluf, she was already looking much brighter. The answer set Leyton dreaming. He sat down mournfully at Sidi-Malik's bedside. The bombardment of the oasis went on until nine o'clock, and

then stopped altogether. The reason for this sudden silence had begun to puzzle everybody, when Si-Hamza, wholly unexpected, entered the hospital.

"I bring you strange news," he said to Leyton, whom he found waiting on the stairs. Where is Doctor Dugon?"

In answer, Leyton pushed the door and ushered him into the sick-room. Without allowing the gruff expression of the head surgeon to intimidate him, the chieftain delivered himself of his message.

"Doctor Dugon," he said, "it is the Sultan's wish that your assistant, Doctor Farlède, reports immediately to headquarters. He will take with him whatever surgical instruments and medical supplies you can possibly spare. I trust you will find this not altogether impossible, since it will go, not to our own men, but to French troops. I take the greatest pleasure in informing you, gentlemen, that a flag of truce has been displayed, that an armistice has been arranged, and that, in consideration of their obstinate defence, the troops of the Wad-el-Haluf have been admitted to capitulation under safe conduct. They will be granted the honors of war. At ten o'clock to-morrow Major d'Ornano and his men will go forth with arms, baggage and flying colors."

The words "arms, baggage and flying colors" brought Leyton forward, pale as a ghost. Si-Hamza, scarcely less moved than himself, offered his hand. For a minute the two men clasped each other, so choked with emotion that tears brightened the eyes of both. This was, indeed, a triumph for their common friend. Twice had d'Ornano declined to surrender unconditionally. Twice had Abder-Rhaman represented to him that his holding the bastion

another week would not materially improve French fortunes. He might be an annoyance; he could not be an obstacle; and in a week, at the most, he was bound to succumb to the need of water. Figuig was conquered so completely that the Moslems, sure that the small garrison would never be able to threaten its rear, could afford to leave the bastion behind them and go north. D'Ornano had dared him to try it. He had undertaken to prove that he was still able to demoralize the Moslem army, and he had succeeded, earning for himself the right of going forth a free man, with his tricolor flying and his weapons ready for future encounters. Furthermore, he would be granted the honors of war. He would receive the homage of the conqueror himself. He would lead his troops past Moslem cavalry with a challenge in his eyes and in every note of his bugles. For him who had maintained his ground against odds, who had held at bay troops a hundred times more numerous than his own, such results were far more satisfactory than victory itself. And, indeed, it was not surrender in disguise! Useless in Figuig, the troops of the Wad-el-Haluf compelled the foe to let them proceed where they would again ambush and fight.

It struck Leyton that this Abd-er-Rhaman was a gentleman, after all. Moslem or not, the man who, afflicted with such lieutenants as Bou-Amel, dared admit a gallant enemy to honorable capitulation, possessed moral courage. The descendant of the Prophet rose by this sole act higher than his ancestors, grim fighters as they were. It remained to be seen whether he could keep his word in the face of the threatened opposition of Bou-Amel.

Gisèle had disappeared at Si-Hamza's first words.

Leyton went in search of her. He found her, bathed in tears, in the operating-room.

The fit over, she accepted when he asked her to go with him for a ride, and the whole of their ramble she evinced the most charming humor. At last he had found the Gisèle of the old days. Her originality of views and causticity of retorts had reappeared. She was still a little pale, but no longer moody; in short, she was again the charming companion of Marakesh. Perhaps it was not without a shade of bitterness that the painter reflected upon the cause of the two transformations he had witnessed. And the man who had brought them about would leave Figu on the morrow! He dared not ask her what plans she had formed, and on her side she did not once make a direct allusion to the Wad-el-Haluf.

As he got up, next morning, he was surprised by the entrance of Sidi-Malik and Anoun-Dialo. The camel-driver explained that he had left the hospital like a thief, because the doctor, despite his strenuous protests and repeated affirmations that he could ride, insisted upon keeping him in bed; and he wanted to see d'Ornano leave his fort.

A quarter of an hour later it was Muhamed-ben-Khadour's turn to present himself at the door. The Aissaoui came to give an account of his mission. The one-eyed M'zabite had been found. He waited outside. Although he had not been captured and brought to El-Maïz Inferior without violence to his person, as his torn clothing testified, Muhamed now ushered him in with all the marks of deep reverence, and Sidi-Malik went to the length of getting up from the bed to invoke his blessing.

But the baraka granted, it was in a most matter-of-fact way that the camel-driver conducted his cross-questioning.

The prisoner answered questions indifferently. He seemed somewhat weak-minded. 'Yes, it was in his company that Djeïlma had visited the cell of Sidi-Malik. Where was she now? Manarf!' This with the characteristic shrug of the shoulder suggestive of serene ignorance. 'The ways of Allah are unfathomable. Why should he know? He was an old man, very weak and very meskeen.' Leyton gave him a mitkal to enhance the poor opinion he had of himself. 'Blest be the Protector of the Poor! Would the blessing of an old man repay the gift? The woman? Oh yes. *Ya Sidi*, she was in Bou-Amel's harem.'

He admitted that eunuch Mustapha was known to him, and he gave of the personage a description tallying with what Sidi-Malik knew of his victim. But he protested that his knowledge of what had taken place in Bou-Amel's zenana did not extend any further. At this Sidi-Malik became very angry. He ordered Muhamed to search the prisoner and see if he did not carry a tin cup. And when the object was found, he gravely asked Leyton whether a man who had murdered a wounded soldier to possess himself of his drinking-vessel did not deserve to have his head cut off.

The M'zabite began to implore, vehemently protesting that he had stolen the cup from a corpse and not from a wounded man. Leyton, convinced that he had told all he knew, was on the point of putting an end to the cruel game, when Si-Hamza made his appearance. Made ac-

quainted with the question at issue, he stopped the proceedings and, drawing a paper from his belt, handed it to Leyton, adding that he had found it in the holster of his saddle when looking for his revolver. The painter followed him into the next room where the chieftain translated the message.

"By the favor of God, and with the help of the woman who is writing, Mustapha is again a grand eunuch. This is to remind thee that he came here almost naked, and that it is only with Allah and his prophet that money has no power. At present I see no way to escape; but I am listening. Bou-Amel will not be foiled of his revenge; so remember Sidi d'Ornano and be watchful. See whether Mustapha cannot be bought. I made him what he is, and yet he leaves me no freedom, knowing well that he loses all the day I succeed in escaping. Remember the bargain we made. Abd-er-Rhaman has now a friend in the very heart of his foe. I send thee my love and I yearn for a glimpse of thy face, for Bou-Amel is as ugly as Sidi-Malik himself. How is Sidi Leitoun?"

In spite of his insistence, Si-Hamza refused to communicate the message to Sidi-Malik. The curiosity of the camel-driver, and his peevishness after refusal, were so childish that they afforded great diversion to the two friends. He again swore that Djeilma would have news from him before long, and, his rage growing as he spoke, he ended the performance by kicking the M'zabite out-of-doors.

Si-Hamza went back to headquarters. Leyton decided also to take a ride. For the first time since the Moslem troops had entered Figuig, he found the oasis quiet and peaceful in the sunlight. Near the canals, native khames were working under the palms, desperately striving to repair the losses inflicted by war. Village women were

washing among the reeds. Although already hot, the temperature was at that hour perfectly bearable, and a strong breeze blew from the north. The exertion of riding having reëstablished the painter's equilibrium, the acute mental activity of the last few days gave way to more serene feelings.

He would not go back to the hospital. Although Gisèle had not even alluded to her projects, he had no doubt that she would follow Assistant-Surgeon Farlède and take her place as a nurse in the rear of d'Ornano's troops. He did not intend to interfere. Abd-er-Rhaman had treated him as a friend. He would remain with the Moslems to gather material for future work.

The thought that he would have to take leave of his cousin in the presence of the Corsican was somewhat bitter. But he brightened at the thought that he could instil enough coolness into his farewell to cause the girl to realize that she had often treated him with too little regard. As for d'Ornano, he would be careful to create the impression that his refusal to follow the column to the French lines was not dictated by any bitterness, but simply by the desire of profiting by the opportunity of a lifetime. His rival need not be told why he was tired of love-making.

While he busied himself with these simple thoughts, his exploration took him past the mosque from whose minaret he had seen the Moslems enter Figui. He alighted and went up the winding stairway. The bodies of the soldiers and of the telephone operator had been removed and buried. But the apparatus was still there, broken, this time, kicked into a corner as an invention of the devil. He looked at his watch. Half-past nine. In half an hour

d'Ornano would leave his bastion and begin his march through the Moslem lines. It was high time to go back.

When he reached the Wad-el-Haluf, a quarter of an hour later, he found the whole of the river-bed lined, for more than three miles, with Moslem troops. Abd-er-Rhaman had done things in an imperial way. As he passed in front of these contingents, the painter figured that there were forty thousand cavalry in the canyon, in ranks eight deep, all motionless behind their crescent-surmounted red and green standards.

Passing under the bastion, he looked up; but he saw no signs of activity. Ten minutes yet would elapse before the actual evacuation, and d'Ornano could be trusted not to leave a minute too soon. Inquiring where he would find Abd-er-Rhaman, he was told by an elderly khaïd in gorgeous garb that the Sultan, surrounded by all his bashaghas, waited higher up, in the midst of the Ouled-Sidi-Sheiks. He went at a slow gait in the direction pointed out, taking note of the bearing and behavior of these centaurs under harness. There was only cavalry there. As he expected, Bou-Amel's Saharans had not been drawn upon; but, to his extreme surprise, he found the old Maddhi at Abd-er-Rhaman's side, in front of the bashaghas.

Facing the Sultan, he made a military salute and spurred his horse with the intention of taking his place higher up. He was overtaken by Si-Hamza. The young man left the ranks at a command from his chief and galloped after his friend to extend him a special invitation to take place among the sheikhs. Leyton turned back. Somewhat nervously, he thanked the Sultan, who expressed with a

smile his desire to keep one of his kidnappers at his side while the other passed by, and he entered the ranks at Si-Hamza's right hand, haughtily returning the stare of Bou-Amel, who kept his only eye riveted on him with malignant curiosity.

He did not have to wait long. Up the canyon, the clear notes of a bugle made themselves heard, and something appeared at the very place where so many of Bou-Amel's men had found death under the crumbling rocks. Boiling impatience took hold of him. Forgetting Gisèle, forgetting a multitude of little facts from which he had suffered in the course of the last week, he thought only of the gesture he would make with his yatagan when d'Ornano's tricolor would pass him. After all, this tricolor was a little his own flag, something that perhaps already floated in the dreams of its maker, Lafayette, when the *fleur-de-lys* of monarchical France arose alongside Washington's standards. He waited. The blot at the entrance of the canyon spread into a line. Bugles and drums sounded nearer. Now, as the day he had followed Si-Hamza into Figuig, the two persons who made up his individuality were at odds. What a fool that emotional Leyton was, to be sure! This was neither his land nor his people, and yet he partook of the soul-filling emotion flushing the faces of the coming Legionaries. The more rational of the two personalities wondered a minute if d'Ornano's triumph was not also partly his own; if heroism is not the common property of mankind; if he, who elevates himself, does not add to the value of humanity as a whole, improving the race by setting a new standard. In the still atmosphere he could hear every note of the glad challenge voiced by the bugles. They

were coming nearer. Funny how military music can affect the nerves! The painter could now distinguish the uniforms of the Legion from those of Turcos, Bataillons d'Afrique and Colonial Infantry. A red burnous caught his eye. This was the quartermaster-sergeant of spahis whose flight he had watched from the oasis. Thank God! He had not died of his wound! Both Leytons were now perfectly foolish. A lump was now slowly coming up their common throat and their sight was blurred with tears.

Soldiers they! Why is it that Gordon Highlanders, Algerine Turcos or Afghan Ghazis, tramping behind their colors, will upset the vase of emotion? The painter swore that he would not look again until they were so near that he could distinguish faces. He turned his head towards Beni-Ounif. He knew well that, at the head of his column, d'Ornano was saluting in turn all the Moslem standards. The shiver of shining steel, raised to the eyes' level by one contingent after the other, became more distinct every minute. A nerve-racking rattle of cymbals followed the snap of guttural commands uttered by Moslem commanders. They were now so near that he felt the tremor of the ground. An order from Abd-er-Rhaman exploded in the stillness. The keen blades left the scabbards. His fingers clenched around the hilt of his yatagan, Leyton turned his head and looked straight in front of him.

The Foreign Legion was drawing abreast. A lieutenant, a sergeant and a guide headed the march. Bugles and drums were now silent. More impressive than music came the regular tramping of footfalls. The first section passed by, arms on the shoulders, without even the turning of a head. Leyton was wondering if, after all, there would

be no salute, when d'Ornano himself entered the sector of his vision. The Corsican commander, his eye on the Sultan, was calculating the distance. He slowly lifted the hand that held the sword:

"Haltel!"

Crisper commands exploded behind. One after the other the different troops came to a dead stop. D'Ornano spoke again:

"Par le flanc gauche. . . . Gauche!"

This was taken up by the subalterns. The whole troop instantly faced Abd-er-Rhaman. The Corsican snapped in quick succession:

"Portez . . . armes!"

"Presentez . . . armes!"

"Au drapeau!"

Bugles and drums took up the tune of the colors. At a command from their chief, Abd-er-Rhaman's bashaghas raised the hilt of their yatagans to the nose. So long as drums and bugles kept up the tune, d'Ornano and the Sultan faced each other, both motionless and silent, each looking straight into the other's eyes. The Corsican spoke again:

"Portez . . . armes!"

"Armes sur l'épaule . . . droite!"

It was over. In the silent salute accomplished with the sword, the two foes had acknowledged each other's valor, exchanged defiance and sworn to meet again. Nothing remained now but for d'Ornano to resume his march and pass on. However, before he had time to issue the necessary command, Bou-Amel left the Sultan's side. The bewildered Leyton caught sight of him as he stepped in front of his chief.

"Mind, Franzawi dog, that Bou-Amel is still alive," he roared, his clenched fist threatening the French commander. "I am not tied by promises, Bismillah! And, if it pleases God, thou shalt not progress very far."

Then an incredible thing came to pass. Abd-er-Rhaman's horse leapt from his place, colliding with Bou-Amel's mount. No doubt the clash had been calculated with a view to its result, for the Saharan chieftain lost his balance and rolled in the dust at d'Ornano's feet. What struck Leyton at this moment as the most wonderful part of the performance was that neither the Corsican nor his troop betrayed the slightest sign of surprise or flustration. Not a man as much as winced in the French ranks. But while they retained over themselves the control born of discipline, on the Moslem side every bashagha left his place. Before Bou-Amel had time to regain his footing, ten yatagans whistled above his head, one of them slashing his burnous.

It was not Abd-er-Rhaman who saved his life, but Si-Hamza. Indeed, the Sultan, his eyes flashing with unrestrained fury, had already raised his sabre. The execution would have taken place there and then had not the young chief of the Ouled-Sidi-Sheiks thrown himself in the thick of the scrimmage and protected the Maddhi with his burnous. He pushed the others back and shouted: "Barca! Barca! . . . That's enough."

The bashaghas fell back. Perhaps they were afraid of striking the wrong man; perhaps, aware of the rivalry existing between protector and protégé, they were curious to learn the reasons of Si-Hamza's interference. They made room. They had hardly done so when the chieftain,

raising his hand, cut the Maddhi across the face with his riding-whip.

"Mind," he said, pointing to d'Ornano, "that I am Si-Hamza, and that my territory now extends from Figuig to the country of the Beni-Matar. Twenty thousand Ouled-Sidi-Sheiks protect that man; all good fighters. Whoever shall pluck a hair from his head shall drag at my horse's tail all the way from here to Shott-el-Shergui, I swear by the beard of my father!"

He looked at d'Ornano, who returned his smile, bowing also to Leyton. But this was all the Corsican's acknowledgment of the obligation. He turned his attention to his men.

"*Pour defiler,*" he commanded. "*Par files de quatre, à droite, en avant. . . . Marche!*"

Instantly bugles and drums took up the defiant tune of "Pan, pan, l'arbi." The buglers were blowing themselves purple in the triumphant challenge. Try as he might, Leyton could not see those who came behind. In vain did he search the French ranks for Gisèle. The military music kept up ringing in his ears and his eyes were blurred with tears. Fainter and fainter sounded the air dear to African infantry:

Pan, pan, l'arbi.
Les chacals sont par ici.
Ils sont là, près du pont.
Ils vont boulotter tes moutons

Pan, pan, l'arbi.
Les chacals sont par ici.
Les chacals et les vitriers
N'ont jamais laissé
Les colons nu-pieds.

All had passed, when he heard, in the blue distance of the waterless canyon, a choir of human voices taking up a tune. This was the war song of the Foreign Legion, the pæan of the heroic disinherited, Poles, Alsatians, Germans, Irish, God knows what, to whom the French tricolor had given something to fight for. And their banner was the only one in the French army where the motto "For honor" had taken the place of "For the Fatherland." At the thought that never in history this so-called scum of twenty civilizations had held their honor to be below the sublime, the words of their *sursum corda* came to his trembling lips:

Soldats de la Légion,
De la Légion Etrangère,
N'ayant pas de nation,
La France est votre mère. . . .

It was too much! Overwhelmed by the mad desire to kiss d'Ornano, to kiss them all, to sob, if sobbing could relieve this atrocious pain in the throat, he spurred his horse and was gone, raising, as he galloped after the French column, a shower of stones and dust.

CHAPTER XXV

THE ENIGMATICAL CAFARD

The sight which met Leyton's eyes as he left the canyon compelled him to slacken his speed. It was Gisèle on a refractory Spanish mule, her feet in a basket, one hand holding the pommel of the pack-saddle, the other preventing her jars of quinine and sterilized gauze from colliding with a heavy marble mortar. Strong as he was, Anoun-Dialo was no match for the mule; and for all his pulling he was losing ground. Gisèle, in danger of an instant catastrophe, was screaming. As the baskets on which she sat were full of jars and bottles containing pharmaceutical supplies, the results of a fall were easy to foresee; and it seemed certain that, if the struggle was protracted, the animal would end by sitting down in a pool of muddy water.

The American hurried to the rescue. His first care was to point out to the Senegalese that a mule should be pulled, not by the mouth, but by the tail, with due consideration for his feelings. Anoun-Dialo had no sooner changed his tactics than the mule started forward, spilling the negro, who wisely chose to bite the dust rather than receive a kick. He perspired abundantly, and arose so covered with sand that he was almost white. Leyton succeeded in catching the animal by the nose.

Now that the scare was over, Gisèle was disposed to laugh over the adventure. She wore a brand-new uniform.

In the white apron and the low-necked shirt-waist of blue gingham, the red cross of Geneva on the right arm, in short sleeves, she looked like a milkmaid of the "Noces de Jeanette" or the "Cloches de Corneville." Leyton thought her so charming that he asked permission to ride with her. This was granted, the young woman adding, with a look of merriment which shored the remark of its causticity, that it was not for the sake of company, but because the mule seemed to follow a horse more willingly than he led.

Leyton's only retort was a compliment on her appearance. She cut it short by requesting him to go a little faster, adding that otherwise she would never catch up with the column. The American put his horse at a canter.

Wiping his face with his sleeve, Anoun-Dialo trotted behind the mule, just out of reach of a kick. Once, by dealing the animal a sound blow with his matrack, he attempted to avenge the humiliation of his fall; and no doubt he would have repeated the performance at regular intervals, had not Gisèle, almost dismounted by the sudden start of the surprised animal, positively forbidden him to renew the attack. It was already quite enough, she averred, that she should have to submit to the hard trot of the animal in so insecure a position.

His feelings wounded, the Senegalese began to lag behind and soon dropped out of sight. The painter and the young woman went on for twenty minutes. At the end of the first hour's march, the column made a ten minutes' stop in Beni-Ounif. They came abreast of the rear-guard just as it was leaving the oasis to file onto the railroad track they were to follow on their march northward.

They were Joyeux *—members of the Bataillon d'Infanterie Légère d'Afrique who had held the bastion of Djebel-Zenaga until d'Ornano had come to their rescue. They were singing, this time with the permission of their chiefs, the defiant song of their corps:

Et quand il faut servir cett'bon Dieu d'République
Ou qu'tout l'monde est soldat malgré son consent'ment
On nous envoi 'grossir les Bataillons d'Afrique
A cause que les Joyeux z'aiment pas l'gouvernement.
C'est nous les Joyeux
Les petits Joyeux
Les p'tits marlous Joyeux qui n'ont pas froid aux yeux.

In front of them came the caravan of camels, donkeys and Spanish mules which carried the wounded, the ammunition and the food supply. All these animals, with the artillery horses, had been furnished by Abd-er-Rhaman, in accordance with the articles of capitulation.

As they hurried forward, Gisèle and the painter were joined by Farlède and Sidi-Malik. Leyton engaged in a conversation with the young surgeon. Meantime, Gisèle struck a bargain with the camel-driver. The upshot of it was that she dismounted from her mule and took Sidi-Malik's horse. She was in the saddle so quickly that Leyton had barely time to shake Farlède's hand and spur his own mount. She flew past him like an arrow. But presently, seeing that it was his intention to follow, she waited for him.

* The Joyeux are a body of troops whose members have been convicted for petty larceny, assault and battery, etc., before joining the colors. Discipline is extremely severe in the Bat-d'Af, so-called by abbreviation.

The painter noticed that she was frowning. But the cloud was of such short duration that it failed to convey to him her desire to be left alone. As he thought only of the short time he had to spend with her before going back to Figui, it did not occur to him that her look of annoyance referred to d'Ornano and meant as plain as words: "Two is company; three is a crowd." Side by side, they passed the convoy and the hospital corps, finally reaching the artillery. These men were also singing. In front of them, Colonial Infantry—*marsouins*, in military slang—having heartily joined in the war song of the Legionaries, and knowing full well that when the twenty-four stanzas would be exhausted their turn would come, now struck up the tune in honor of the gunners. The realization of their ambitions would take some time, as the song was only at its beginning.

Si vous voulez jouir des plaisirs de la vie,
Engagez vous ici, dedans (sic) l'artillerie.
Quand l'artilleur de Metz change de garnison,
Toutes les femmes de Metz se mettent au balcon.
Artilleur, mon vieux frère,
A ta santé vidons nos verres;
Et repètons ce gai refrain:
Vivent les artilleurs; à bas les fantassins.

The last verse, it must be said, being contemptuous of foot soldiers, was sung by gunners alone, the Foreign Legion changing it to "*Vivent les artilleurs, l'absinthe et le bon vin*," and Colonial Infantry to "*Vivent les artilleurs, la femme et les marsouins*." All were equally bad rhymes; but, in all lands, barrack poetry prides itself more on its spontaneous sprightliness than on chastened language;

barrack songs, as a rule, being calculated to bring the flush of shame on the emaciated brows of dead Messalina and dead Thais.

The Second Company of the Third Tirailleurs, natives, joined in the song with disastrous results. It cannot be said that the two companies of the Foreign Legion, ahead of them, were doing much better. There were among them too many foreigners whose knowledge of French was so limited that they could barely understand the military commands. Still, the Frenchmen among them succeeded in making themselves heard; and the Germans were, as a rule, too great lovers of music to take with the measure the liberties their swarthier brothers indulged in. No doubt they would have preferred their own wild "*Youpaïdi, youpaïda*"; but they were good-natured. They must be, since one of their favorite songs was the famous anti-German ragtime: "*Vous avez pris l'Alsace et la Lorraine; mais, malgré vous nous resterons Français.*"

The singing subsided as soon as Gisèle was sighted. The men who, three weeks before, had met d'Ornano and the young woman in the gorges of the Zousfana, had recognized her. As d'Ornano was nowhere to be seen, Leyton addressed himself to one of the men. He chanced to fall upon Corporal O'Hara. He had spoken in French; but the Irishman immediately answered in English:

"Be you that American man, cousin of this here young lady?" he inquired. "The tip of the morning to you. Eh, Larry, where is he?"

"Where is who?" grunted the stolid Larry at his side.

"Our man. Who could I mean but the man that nigger of a camel-driver—Sidi-Malik they call him—licked all over,

from bit to hind hoof, and nicknamed 'Sword of the French' this fine morning?"

"If it is the Major you mean, and not his horse, he went to reconnoitre with the vanguard. The Captain of them Colonial Infantry, and Capo di Borgo is with him."

"You have heard, sir?" resumed O'Hara, addressing Leyton with a wink. "He will be back in a minute. If it is that you are after waiting for him, you and the young lady, I'm liking to ask you a question, sir."

"Two, if you want," said the painter, exchanging a look of merriment with his companion. "What is it?"

"What's the price of tobacco in these parts?"

Exploding, Leyton hurriedly searched his belt for his pouch. "Tobacco?" he replied. "Here is the whole of my supply. You are welcome. Keep it, by all means, and share it with your comrades. I am only sorry I did not bring more of it."

"And thank you, sir. Here's the Major coming."

The Irishman pointed ahead with a lighted match. As the painter and his companion went on to meet their friend, one of the by-standers, undoubtedly a Parisian, caught Gisèle's eye, smiled and immediately began to sing. Leyton was unable to determine whether it was in honor of the tobacco or in a spirit of mockery that he struck up a tune which the whole column, their eyes fixed on the young woman, took up after him:

Mad'moiselle, voulez vous du tabac?

Monsieur, je n'en use,

Monsieur, je n'en use,

Mad'moiselle, voulez vous du tabac?

Monsieur, je n'en use.

Pas.

When they caught up with the party, Gisèle's cheeks were aflame. Captain Jarchin and Lieutenant Capo di Borgo, partaking of the general spirit of fun, were laughing. Di Borgo went to the length of producing his cigarette-case and proffering it first to the young woman. She declined indignantly. A glance at d'Ornano had been sufficient to tell her that the Corsican was displeased. He was frowning and biting his lip. However, he smiled when he took the hand the painter extended him.

"So you come back to duty, you deserter," he said cheerfully enough. "I thought you had turned bashagha in the Sultan's retinue. In a way, I am glad of it; you had a good place to see the fun. Lord, but that cut across the face given Bou-Amel by Si-Hamza did my heart good! I wish I could tell the young fellow. He will not come, of course. He believes that I cannot give him the hand now that he has changed sides. How is it that you are the last to turn up, Leyton? The rascally Sidi-Malik left a bed of sickness to come and hail me 'Sword of the French'; so that I am the joke of the whole column. He was bawling so loudly that I had to threaten him with a spanking. As I am kissing everybody, I kissed him too. I had to do it. I believe that if I hadn't raised him to my saddle the fellow would have kissed my boots."

He turned to Gisèle. She was purple with embarrassment, and each one of his words had entered her heart. It was true that she was the last to come, and everything conspired against her. While she had intended to meet him alone, she had been joined by her cousin. The painter's gift of his tobacco had resulted in drawing upon her the curiosity of all; and she had seen in many eyes the

amused familiarity with which a public, a French public especially, regards a couple of lovers. There is contagion in such an atmosphere. She realized that d'Ornano, aware of the feelings the painter entertained towards her, might suspect her of having gone back to an old flirtation. Yet the presence of strangers forbade her to dispel the misunderstanding. Her dismay was such that she was unable to speak. And all the time she was aware that, with true Corsican hypersensitiveness, d'Ornano would believe himself slighted if she did not find a word to praise the defence of the Wad-el-Haluf.

Captain Jarchin completed her confusion by remarking with ineffable lack of tact:

"Mlle. de Diolie must feel greatly relieved now that, by the release of her cousin, she has again found a protector."

It seemed to Gisèle that under her eyes d'Ornano turned to stone. But he spoke very quietly, as if he meant only a compliment.

"And I don't know but that Mlle. de Diolie will find the company of an artist an invaluable boon in our midst," he said. "With her literary leanings, she may find much to study in a camp, but little congenial conversation. The opportunities to talk transcendental psychology are scarce hereabout."

If Gisèle was conscious of having been awkward in allowing herself to become the victim of circumstances, she was at least certain that her behavior did not deserve a sarcasm. D'Ornano's veiled irony served also to conceal an injustice. She had given little thought to transcendental psychology in the course of the two weeks she had spent in the hospital. And she could not admit that on so slight a

provocation—it was little more, after all, than the provocation of silence—the Corsican should show himself jealous and spiteful.

“It is scarcely possible that I shall need a protector,” she replied with the same airiness he had himself used; “and George has too much of a tendency to believe that William Shakespeare has made a corner in psychology to be counted as a philosopher. Nevertheless, he possesses three qualities that I love: fair-mindedness, good-nature and an almost absolute forgetfulness of self. Don’t you think this is enough to render him interesting?”

If Jarchin and Capo di Borgo were the dupes of the comedy, not so with Leyton, whom frequent encounters of this kind had taught the difficult art of reading the moods of his cousin. He was well aware that the few words just spoken contained a challenge. Yet he remained in total darkness concerning the cause of the quarrel. D’Ornano’s words appeared to him so innocent, their irony was so mild, that he could not admit that it was he who had been first in taking up the cudgels. A hundred little things noticed by the young woman had escaped his more superficial observation. He had come with the expectation that his friend and his cousin would betray with the first glance the relation he supposed existed between them. He could not, therefore, but be bewildered when, instead of the quiet smile of happiness he had almost feared to witness, he heard Gisèle praise him for characteristics which she evidently implied d’Ornano lacked.

His gratification was so evident that Gisèle, who watched him from the corner of her eye, decided instantly that he should pay for it. Her irritation claimed a victim. Since

the painter had been the instrument which had served to arouse d'Ornano's jealousy, and since it was partly his fault that she had been humiliated, it was only right that he should now serve to make d'Ornano suffer in his turn and cure him of his distrust. It might also teach the Corsican the true value of his love, and infuse into him the courage to break a silence which had become ridiculous.

All this was decided with the heartlessness peculiar to the better half of mankind. Only a week ago, Gisèle had been filled with pity, almost with remorse, at the thought that Leyton would suffer by the knowledge that d'Ornano had won in the contest. Now she was ready to use him again to her ends regardless of the suffering he might undergo in the process. As he accompanied her to the rear of the column, the American was far from suspecting that he was just about to become a mere piece in a game of chess. It appeared from what he had heard that his cousin attached some value to his company. He meant to ascertain to what extent she needed his friendship. They had now reached the rear of the convoy. Seeing Sidi-Malik hurrying in their direction, Gisèle checked her horse. Leyton chose the moment when, raised on the stirrup, she prepared to dismount, to issue his proclamation of independence.

"My dear," he said, "I am sorry to leave you; but the time has come to say good-by."

She lifted upon him a pair of blue eyes wide with surprise.

"Good-by! Why? . . . What's the matter? Where are you going?"

"Back to Figui, of course. The reason why I did not

“speak earlier of the plan I have formed to follow future operations and try to paint on the spot something worth while, is that I was myself unaware of your intention to follow the column. Si-Hamza has my promise to stay and Abd-er-Rhaman is still waiting for the study he asked for.”

Here also the reproach was apparent. But it was precisely the taunt she felt in his words which reminded the young woman that she had a battle to win.

“I do not understand, George,” she said. “This is rather sudden, isn’t it? Surely, even if you were not told—I forget many things nowadays—you must have guessed that I would sometime depart for the coast. Why should I remain in Figuig any longer than necessary? I was bound to wait for you to take me home. But you are free.”

“Free,” he said, astounded. “What do you mean?”

“I mean that it is not right! Surely, after I waited for you three weeks in the hospital, you can’t refuse to take me home. If I had known, I would have taken the train for Oran, as General Pluvigné advised, the day I reached the oasis.”

The morning had been fertile in surprises; but Leyton’s amazement knew no bounds when he noticed that the eyes of his companion were bright with coming tears. Marvellous psychology of woman! In perfect good faith, Gisèle now believed herself abused. Upon the humiliation she had suffered in her meeting with d’Ornano followed this deception: her cousin claimed his freedom. No doubt, she thought that she had actually waited for him. She had said so to General Pluvigné; then there must be some truth in the matter. What could the painter do in the face of this attitude? If it was true that the young woman

really felt the need of somebody to take her home, he would accompany her to Paris and return in two weeks. If, on the other hand, he had mistaken the depth and the nature of her interest in his rival, it were better for him to remain where perhaps there was a chance to recapture the position his absence had lost him.

Plainly, Gisèle had expected that d'Ornano would repent of his surliness, and would make a visit to the wounded the pretext to effect a reconciliation. But this hope died as the afternoon wore towards its close. It was then that she decided that it was time to strike. She went to Farlède, obtained from him the permission to go for a ride, and asked Leyton to accompany her.

They proceeded at a small trot towards the front of the column. D'Ornano and the officers surrounding him raised their hands to their kepis as they passed. But nobody gave a sign of an intention to join them. To avoid giving the impression that he was purposely holding aloof, the Corsican had engaged his subordinates in a discussion of a point of tactics. The result was that the highly wrought young woman hysterically suspected that it was his intention to leave her thus severely alone, with the object of giving her to understand that the place of the nurse is in the hospital. The thought brought the blood to her cheeks. Suddenly spurring her mount, she shot in a direction at right angles to that followed by the column, not even turning her head to see whether Leyton was following.

She led him a lively chase. Sidi-Malik's horse was a present from Si-Hamza and a thoroughbred "air drinker." For twenty minutes the puzzled Leyton had to keep bent in the saddle, handicapped by his weight, but grimly de-

terminated to overtake her. Fearing lest her horse, while going at that fearful pace, should stumble and throw her, he shouted to her to stop; but she was unmindful of his warnings. At last she slowed down, stopping at the bottom of a gully. When he reached the place, she had alighted.

She was shaking the dust off her skirt. Her anger was now spent. She sat down, and for half an hour they talked on different subjects. Leyton's account of the rôle Djeïlma had played in his escape succeeded in restoring her to complete good-humor. She began to talk of the life she had led in the hospital. After this exchange of confidences, unconsciously they found themselves again on the old ground of fraternal friendship. But it was Leyton who felt most gratified for the change. The web he had been so long in weaving, and which she had so easily broken, was repaired. This time he was determined not to give her the chance of escaping.

When they rose to go back it was dusk. The light of bivouac fires guided them to camp. At this hour the troopers, squatting between stacked rifles, were busy around the pots where the mutton of the evening meal was boiling.

The smell of cooking brought Leyton to a sense of his situation. Gisèle was the assistant of Doctor Farlède. Sidi-Malik and Anoun-Dialo had already been given a job as camel-drivers. He had neither tent nor food, and he was nobody's guest. After all, he had best ride back to Figuig, inform Si-Hamza of his plan to go to Paris for a fortnight, and obtain from him the necessary supplies. If Sidi-Malik consented to serve as guide, he would be back the next day at an early hour.

Just as he was about to go in search of the camel-driver, the arrival of an orderly came to settle his situation. D'Ornano invited him to dine at the officers' mess.

Farlède was at this moment giving his nurse instructions concerning the wounded.

"Wait a minute!" he called to the painter. "I am going with you."

He asked for some water wherewith to wash his hands, and looked around for his coat. It was Gisèle who brought it. As he took the garment a thought struck him.

"And what shall we do with you?" he said to the young woman. "I see no other way but for you to come with us. The attendants can be left in charge for an hour."

"No, thank you," she replied dryly. "I never go where I am not wanted. Moreover, I have just come back from a ride. It is only right that I should relieve you when you take your meals."

Leyton made no comment, and the young surgeon merely remarked that he would call d'Ornano's attention to the subject. At table, the American was given a cheerful welcome. It seemed to him that d'Ornano showed something of a tendency to isolate himself from the general conversation. Yet he did not forget his guest; and he spoke several times, always on the subject of Si-Hamza, Abd-er-Rhaman and the operations Leyton had witnessed the day the Moslems had entered the oasis. Towards the close of the meal, he told the American that he fully expected he would accept a place in his tent. Leyton thanked him. And as everybody was strolling out to smoke a cigar or a cigarette, he started on a tour of the camp.

He had stopped to sketch, by the light of his cigar, a

group of men who had congregated around the dying embers of a bivouac fire, when he became aware that somebody had stopped behind him and was watching over his shoulder. Then the stroller sat down at his side. In the glow of his pipe his face, as red as a brick, emerged from the darkness. Leyton turned to look at the new-comer. It was O'Hara.

"And how be you, sir?"

"Indeed, is that you, O'Hara?" he exclaimed. "You are hail fellow well met. There is too little light to draw by, and I was just looking for the fellow who would tell me something of the men in the Legion."

This request, in appearance so innocent, seemed to displease the Irishman.

"Beg pardon, sir," he scolded. "I thought you was a painter?"

"So I am."

"Then paint them, paint them. Don't ask questions. A Legionary is a dead man."

Leyton looked at him in stupefaction. O'Hara went on:

"See here. I'll speak to you because you are young, while most of us is graybeards with a stomach ruined by Spanish alcohol; also because I like myself a smack of the English tongue. While you are around, go smooth and be easy. Of course, we can speak of the dead ones because they suffer no more. But what will you be saying when I tell you that we had among us an archbishop and a prince of Hohenzollern. A Hohenzollern, yes, sir. A German cruiser came to Oran to claim his corpse."

"I beg your pardon," apologized the American. "I

should have known. It was thoughtlessness on my part and nothing more."

"I know it was, and that's why I am talking. We of the Legion are kind of fighting corpses; and there is a rule in the battalions never to try to know and never to tell. Some of us is mere children of sixteen and under. What kind of story can they have? Some, like me and Larry, have not much to conceal. A craving for *aguardiente* was born with us, and we enjoy looking for trouble when there is nothing doing. But it's nothing but God's truth I am telling you when I say that the two regiments of the Legion have between them twenty millionaires. What did they do? . . . Go and ask Dache, the barber of the Zouaves, who grafted a rat's tail on a rat's nose and sold it for a new species to English visitors. To those, sir—I have seen and I know—life is hell. Ask the doctor, and he will tell you that twenty per cent. of us is insane. Be sure you don't bet me your tobacco that it's all due to drink.

"And to what is it due, then?"

"Don't you reckon, sir, that the life of some has its miseries and its shames? Is it queer that they should want to forget or pay for what they've done. The gate's open. Who wants to get killed is given a chance to redeem his past. I was telling you about that Hohenzollern. The first day he was with us he took to his bed and never got up. The three weeks he was in the hospital he never said a word. A long, lean one he was. Seemed to have suffered enough, God knows. 'Twas ghastly to see him die with set teeth."

"Then how was it known he was a Hohenzollern?"

"The imperial family claimed his corpse, I told you.

The same thing happened once to a Spanish grandee. It always comes out by accident, you understand. 'Twas in Mexico, in the sixties, one day that them greasers refused to serve the mass for reasons of politics, and the Colonel wanted it served, that we learned about the archbishop. He was killed soon afterwards; and peace be to his poor soul! It's only while they are on their Golgotha, and bullets won't do them a kindness, that, for us, they are dead ones."

No doubt he would have carried further his reflections on pity, redemption and forgiveness had he not been interrupted by Leyton. The American stood up.

"For God's sake!" he yelled. "What's the matter?"

A brawl was in progress among the soldiers he had been sketching ten minutes before. Shadows were wrestling in the darkness. Somebody yelled:

"He ran me through! . . . Get his bayonet. Kill him, you cowards! . . . Kill him!"

Leyton was on the point of running to the seat of the trouble, when O'Hara grabbed him by the shoulder.

"Hands off!" he said. "It's a case of *cafard* again. Unless you're looking for a puncture in the bowels, you'd better let the patrol attend to it."

He compelled the painter to sit down. A picket made an abrupt appearance on the scene; and in a twinkle two men were hurried away, one to be kept under guard, the other to be taken care of in the hospital.

"Court-martial to-morrow. Sixty days in jail. He will end badly yet," commented O'Hara. "Likely as not he will throw a button in the face of an officer and twelve men will spill his blood in front of a cactus hedge. This

makes the third time he's hurt a man when the *cafard* is frolicking in his head. 'Tis a damn sight too often."

As this strange word, *cafard*, passed his lips again, Leyton turned to look at him. In French slang, the *cafard* is sometimes the school-boy who tells tales on his class-mates. It is applied also to all kinds of sneaks and hypocrites. Properly speaking, it is a bug. Not knowing which definition would fit O'Hara's sentence, the painter asked:

"What the deuce do you mean by '*cafard*'?"

As the Irishman was busy relighting his pipe, he had to wait for an answer.

"The *cafard*? I'll tell you. Ever seen one of them black beetles, the size of the first joint of my thumb, which buries its eggs in a ball of dirt? Away they go with their children, the male pulling, the female pushing with its hind legs. You try to take the ball away from them and hide it. They will be looking for it for a life time. Bother them, maim them; they will keep rolling their children in spite of your superior sense. For sheer, dodgasted fixity of purpose, you have never seen the like of them two animals. Well, now, suppose that a man feels in his belfry a *cafard* a-rolling and a-rolling his ball? It's madness, you call it? You don't know. You never swallowed Spanish stuff when you were coming back from Dahomey shaking with malaria fever. A man comes back from the white man's grave, on Madagascar's west coast, all green from dysentery and congestion of the liver. A Spaniard sells him ten quarts of wine for twenty cents and ten absinthes for a dime. What kind of stuff is that, you will be after asking me? When that sick man feels the

cafard a-rolling in his head, he will be hot on somebody's trail. Sometimes he hurts the Spaniard. The more the pity if he does not, for then he is liable to hurt a friend."

"But the man who did the cutting just now was not drunk!

"Drunk! . . . Drunk as a fish! You can go bail that he stole some alcohol from the hospital."

There was a pause. O'Hara broke it after a minute's silence.

"Want to know what a man is liable to do when bothered by the cafard? First of all, he will sell his belt to a negro for threepence—a penny and his bayonet to a Jew for a shilling. I have known some who sold their medals. They drink that. Then a Juanita gets the rest of their clothing. Sometimes they come back with their garments; but it's just as bad. With one of us it started this way. He was the Colonel's secretary, and an ex-officer at that. One day he dresses in the Colonel's uniform. 'Twas dusk and they did not recognize him. At the gate the sentry bawls: 'Here comes the Colo!' The picket goes out and the whole bunch of them present their arms. In the street he meets lieutenants. They salute. He meets privates. 'Come here!' sez he. 'Get back to barracks. Four days in clink is the effect of my kindness. You are not clean.' He meets a quartermaster-sergeant. 'You know Pepita?'—'Yes, Colonel, she is a trollop!'—'Four days for you. Tell her that at eight o'clock I'll go to her place to kiss my children.' He makes the round of the town and finally lands in a joint way down in the Spanish quarter. He sits down and takes some absinthe. By twelve o'clock he was dancing a cake-walk on the table.

He spent a matter of sixty dollars with never a cent in his pocket; and I'll be damned if he did not succeed in getting back to barracks, leaving to his Colonel the reputation of a true sport."

He stopped, and when Leyton's mirth had subsided he resumed:

"I will tell you another one. This time the man had been packed to clink for drunkenness. When the Corporal shuts him in, he insists upon hanging his medals outside so that they would not be put to shame. Pretty soon he's left alone, and the cafard gets out of his hole and begins trotting. Next day me and that Corporal finds him stiff as a frozen snake and stark naked on the planking. The Corporal sez he: 'Run for the doctor. He's dead.'—'You go yourself,' sez I. 'Look at that mess bowl. That corpse, I tell you, has a bellyful.'

"I leave the grub and off we go. Next morning we come again. We find the corpse same as ever, with his eyes rolled up and showing his teeth. Only the mess bowl had been licked clean.

"This time the Corporal runs for the doctor.—'Boys, the man is playing possum,' sez Mr. Sawbones, when he comes. 'Just give him a good spanking!'

"He smiles and he takes a pinch of snuff. Me and the Corporal we handle that man like a trunk; we pull his hair and we punch his nose until I thought I had worked enough to wreck a whole baggage-car. Never a move from that dead man. 'We will wake him yet,' sez the doctor. 'Go and fetch me the thermo-cautère.' I went because I wanted a drink. But you'd never believe it, sir. While his flesh was frizzling until it stunk in that jail,

that corpse listened only to the cafard. The doctor, sez he, 'Fetch the pump!' But while we played fireman on him, he got stiffer than ever.

"Mr. Sawbones was so puzzled that he took some more snuff to clear his head. Then he begins to talk catalepsy. 'Hold on!' sez I. 'Maybe you had better give me that snuff.'

"Well, sir, that was the one thing that corpse had not thought of and was not prepared to stand. I had no sooner blew some up his nose than he sits up and sneezes:

"'To hell with you. You have drenched my clothes and burned my tattooing.'"

He rose heavily. A bugle was heard in the distance. The tune died in a whisper. It was taps.

Leyton went to bed. He found d'Ornano already asleep.

CHAPTER XXVI

ON THE TAGREMARET ROAD

The march forward was resumed at dawn. The landscape was fast changing. Patches of halfa grass and tufts of drin heralded the proximity of the steppe. The desert was about to end where the halfa belt began; and the demarcation was so sharp that it almost seemed to the American as if he had taken a gigantic step from the Yuma desert into the thin prairie of western Kansas.

Shortly before twelve o'clock an orderly brought to Gisèle the following note:

DEAR M^{LLE}. DE DIOLIE:—An oversight of mine draws protests from all the officers of the column. We expected you last night at supper. I trust you will not nurse a grudge against me for a slight which could not have been intentional. As an assistant of Doctor Farlède, you are entitled to a place in the officers' mess. With the hope that, in the future, you will not deprive your admirers of the charm of your presence, I remain,

Respectfully yours, D'ORNANO.

The indignation the young woman conceived from this reading was so violent that she committed the fault of showing the message to the painter.

"I sha'n't go!" she declared spitefully. "If Major d'Ornano asks you my reasons, you may tell him that my duties as a nurse leave me little time for my admirers.

Tell him also that I fail to see the reasons which compel him to cover a lack of *savoir-vivre* with a hypocrisy. If it is true that I did not have to wait for an invitation, there was no need for him to invite you. I could have done so myself. If it is not true, this cannot be construed as an apology. And if Major d'Ornano owes me one, he is not so far removed from the rear of the column that he cannot come in person. Here are the horns of the dilemma. I came to the result by the help of elementary logic. Let him put in practice the "know thyself" of Socrates—which is not quite transcendental psychology—and he will be able to choose his seat."

In other circumstances Leyton might have smiled. Nobody but Gisèle ever had indignations so pedantic. But it struck him that, in this case, the blue stocking in the making had only worded the emotion of the woman treated with disregard. If he still entertained a doubt concerning the nature of his cousin's infatuation, the bitterness of the remark lifted it.

"My dear girl," he said. "I have no right to ask you questions; but it is evident that there is only a misunderstanding between you and d'Ornano. My presence here is perhaps more than an annoyance; it may be an obstacle. If so, I can only question the wisdom of the course you followed yesterday when you asked me to accompany you to Paris."

Gisèle shrugged her shoulders, opened her mouth to reply, thought better of it and walked away. It was Farlède who carried her answer to d'Ornano's note. The Corsican perused the message rapidly, quietly tore it in small pieces and was silent the rest of the meal.

The column reached Aïn-Sefra a day later. The place had been evacuated by French troops and colonists. In Mecheria they found also a solitude. They were now in the midst of the prairie, the Halfa Sea, as it is called, and one morning they crossed the mud flats of Shott-el-Shergui, before reaching Khreïder. The country was alive with native cavalry, and the French had retreated to Saïda before them. It was learned that Si-Hamza was in Geryville with the Ouled-Sidi-Sheiks and the Beni-Matar. His presence in the vicinity explained the comparatively easy progress of the column. The Corsican knew that Abd-er-Rhaman, on the other side of the railroad, was marching on Sidi-Bel-Abbès. So long as both armies would be near at hand, no danger was to be apprehended from Bou-Amel. But the Moslems moved faster than the little troop. At Krafallah, d'Ornano learned that the Ouled-Sidi-Sheiks had entered Saïda after a semblance of a fight. They were now driving the French colonists like sheep on the Traria road, towards the plain of Egris.

When, at Aïn-el-Hadjar, this piece of news was confirmed, the Corsican no longer attempted to conceal his satisfaction. Si-Hamza had been decoyed. The sham fight of Saïda had been waged to no other purpose than to draw him forward. While he went through Franchetti and Charrier with the wild hope of causing the Beni-Chougran to rise, the French, with Mascara as a base, were preparing to bottle him in the plain of Egris. Nothing short of a sharp recall issued by the Sultan in person could now save the young fool. The net was closing. D'Ornano's glance betrayed his satisfaction. Whatever his personal

feelings for Si-Hamza might be, he wished only ill to the rebellious Ouled-Sidi-Sheiks.

Leaving Aïn-el-Hadjar and the Hauts Plateaux, the column began, in the midst of a perfect solitude, to go down the loop described by the railroad. Here again they met with an almost kaleidoscopic change of landscape. The prairie was now behind. Below them was the Tell. The change was startling. They left the flat expanses of the monotonous steppe to enter, or rather to drop into well-watered mountain land covered with semi-tropical vegetation.

On reaching Saïda, d'Ornano beheld the town in flames. But a still greater surprise awaited him. The sudden whistle of a locomotive was immediately answered by delirious yells from the column. The Corsican saw his men leave their ranks and scatter over the railroad embankment, shouting, laughing and throwing skywards kepis and water-bottles. He swore, but to no avail. A minute later an armored train hove into sight.

There was no end of kissing done as Turcos from the Mascara regiment left the train and began to talk Sabir to the crowd of Marsouins, Legionaries, Bataillons d'Afrique and artillery men. D'Ornano pushed his way towards a lieutenant who was then kissing Capo di Borgo.

"What's your name, Lieutenant?" he called sharply.

The man came to attention and saluted—"Serral, *mon commandant*."

"What in hell are you doing here?"

Serral explained. Detailed by General des Essarts to patrol the railroad between Saïda and Dublineau, he had

been the last in opposing Si-Hamza's march on Thiersville. When he had thought it necessary to retreat, he had found the Traria bridge blown up. He had avoided capture by moving up the line at high speed. Often he had been compelled to stop; but he had managed to keep the foe at bay with his machine-guns while some of his men removed the obstacles placed on the tracks. Despairing of capturing him, Si-Hamza had left him alone. Going back to Traria a last time, he had bumped into Bou-Amel.

The news he brought enabled d'Ornano to form a fairly good estimate of the situation. Si-Hamza was going by way of Thiersville, Palikao and Les Aïssias, with the aim of capturing the heights of Aïn-Farès. Abd-er-Rhaman was at Dublineau, marching on Mascara by Crèveœur. Bou-Amel had come by way of Mercier-Lacombe, intending to close upon Mascara by Fekkan, Tizi and Saint-André. Beaten at Trois-Rivières by General Dusseau, he had been prevented from establishing communications with the Sultan. Weak in cavalry, he was now moving along the heights, no doubt with the intention of occupying both the Saïda and the Frenda roads. D'Ornano understood at once that he could not now reach Mascara without coming in contact with the Saharan chieftain. It was certain that he would be attacked. Wondering where he could best make a stand, he hastily unfolded his topographical map. One word escaped him: Aïn-Guergour.

"What are you going to do now, Lieutenant?" he asked of Serral.

"Go with you, of course," the young man answered. "What can I do? I am stranded. I shall leave the train

here and join you with my hundred men and my two machine-guns."

"You will come handy." The Corsican wheeled around. "Jarchin, Capo, put a little order in that crowd," he ordered. "We are going by way of Tiffrit, Tagremaret and Aïn-Guergour. If Bou-Amel attacks us—and I hope he will—we can make a stand in the pass and wait there until General des Essarts gets the upper hand. When he does we will cut off Bou-Amel's retreat. Is this clear? Go, gentlemen, and tell the troops. The private who understands does better work. We start when you are ready."

The column left Saïda half an hour later and marched until sunset. The night was spent without alarms near a deserted farm. Up to this point the road had crossed a fairly well cultivated country; but from now on the way would lie across the thickest woods in North Africa, the forest of Tiffrit. D'Ornano knew that in them he would run the risk of falling into an ambush; but the mountainous ground was, on the other hand, extremely unfavorable to the evolutions of cavalry. Should he come unexpectedly in contact with Bou-Amel's troops, he could still put his guns in battery upon some crest, and begin there a stout defence, without fear of being swept by an overwhelming rush. But this was a contingency scarcely to be dreaded. In all likelihood, Bou-Amel would advance in the plain of Egris, in close proximity with the foothills; and before he could be apprised of the movement threatening his rear, the column would have reached Tagremaret. D'Ornano knew that from Tagremaret to Aïn-Guergour his men were equal to forcing their way to the pass. Mindful that

he was travelling under safe-conduct, he would not himself fire the first shot; but if Bou-Amel did—and he would—Ain-Guergour would bequeath to posterity the name of another Hamilcar.

Happen what might, the utmost caution was now imperative. Becoming more exacting as danger became imminent, he began to drive his men harder. As Bou-Amel was the man who relied solely on attacks in mass, the column had adopted the marching order which would, in case of a sudden onslaught, permit its commander to convert it in the least possible time into a hollow square—an antiquated formation well adapted to antiquated warfare. The onward progress of the column was swift and silent. There was now no singing. The men kept their ranks, and scouts were busy beating the bush on all sides. The country was solitude itself. This was a government forest preserve, and no farms were to be passed on the highway. Thickets of thuyas, lentiscs, arbutus, carroob, green oak and cork oak succeeded each other. Game was plentiful, especially jerboas, hares and red partridges. From time to time, the forest enclosed an open space covered with thapsias and palmettos. The men shunned the former like plague, knowing what itching and swelling results from its contact. The hillsides were intensely green and blue, the valley opening at intervals on wonderful vistas of hazy distances. Two or three times they came on kubas and their surrounding woods of fig trees. But of inhabitants, none; they did not even meet with shepherds pasturing their sheep.

An incident of importance occurred shortly before sunset. The warning shouts of the scouts had scarcely been heard

when the cadence of horses' hoofs caused d'Ornano to issue the order to halt. In front, a body of horsemen appeared, halted and stood looking for twenty seconds. No shots were exchanged. The horsemen wheeled around and disappeared with the suddenness which had marked their approach. When Capo di Borgo asked his countryman the reason of his forbearance, d'Ornano replied that, technically, not having yet reached the French lines, he was still bound by the agreement entered into with Abd-er-Rhaman. To open hostilities would amount to a breach of faith. Let Bou-Amel fire the first shot, if he dared, and abide by the result.

It was not until night had completely fallen that preparations for camping were made. Unwilling to trust the troop in the woods, d'Ornano decided that the road would do for a camping-ground. Orders were issued that the troopers were to take their supper cold. No bivouac fires were to be lighted. Having taken unusual precautions in posting the outer guard and the sentinels, the Corsican left Captain Jarchin in command and lay down for a few hours of sleep.

At midnight he was up. He had purposely reserved the second watch for himself, knowing full well that if the enemy chose to make a night attack they would not attempt it before the small hours. If such an attack was contemplated, he was loath to leave to another the task of taking dispositions for defence. He had only two captains, and the lieutenants lacked experience in handling men. Captain Jarchin and his colleague, Lesueur, in charge of the artillery, were both excellent officers, thoroughly trained to colonial warfare; but one had chiefly fought Chinese Pavillons Noirs in Eastern Tonkin and upper

Laos, the other mulatto sultans and their retinue of slave-traders in Ouadaï. He alone knew Bou-Amel for a master of surprises. Alone he had a sufficient knowledge of the country's topography to choose at a glance where to strike; and alone, knowing as he did the number of tricks the old Maddhi kept up his sleeve, he had the good sense not to underestimate the ability of the chieftain. The repeated setbacks he had caused his arch-foe to suffer in Figuig, were owing more to Bou-Amel's ignorance of the methods which will reduce a fortress than of a total lack of generalship. But now that he was to meet him in the open, in a country of woods and gullies exactly suited to snares, too much wariness could not be shown. All told, the number of his men did not exceed nine hundred. He had machine-guns and artillery; but, with more than thirty thousand troops to oppose him, a hope of victory could not even be conceived. With boundless luck, he might perhaps be able to reach and hold Aïn-Guergour; but this only on condition that he would absolutely out-class his foe in vigilance, doggedness and generalship.

His first care was to double the sentinels, to multiply the rounds and to relieve the men every hour. He was convinced that, despite the appearance of solitude, his camp was watched by a thousand eyes. He soon obtained the undeniable confirmation of his suspicions. At three o'clock an adjutant reported that, notwithstanding all precautions, two sentries, who had apparently succumbed to the delusion of the moving bush, had just been found dead, one with a flissa sticking between his shoulders, the other with a string around his neck. Knowing that, unless an immediate attack was contemplated, no attempt would have

been made to make away with the watch, d'Ornano ordered that half a company of Marsouins should stand to their arms; and to convince the foe that watch was strictly kept, he ordered a bugler to sound the reveille. The stratagem was successful. The rest of the night passed without further alarms. When dawn colored the hillsides, scouting parties sent to beat the bush reported that not a trace of a foe was left. A smile came upon d'Ornano's lips as he lighted his first cigarette. However, the ordeal was by no means over.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE FARMHOUSE OF AÏN-GUERGOUR

The march towards Tagremaret was resumed at six o'clock. It progressed without incidents worth noting until nine, when the Frenda road was reached and the Wad-el-Abd, an affluent of the Mina, was left behind. Tagremaret was a deserted village. The column was now moving north-west towards Cacherou and Mascara. D'Ornano, who had not bargained for so much, thanked his star. He felt that the attack could not now be long postponed. Bou-Amel would fight for three reasons. In the first place, he could not move on Mascara and leave a hostile command in his rear. The topography of the country gave him a decided advantage. And last, but not least, he had several accounts to settle with the French commander. The fact that a battle had, in all probability, already begun around Mascara, warranted the belief that the storm was about to break with tropical violence. The first roar of thunder came at one o'clock. Ten minutes later the hurricane raged. But luckily for the column, a warning came in time. It was brought by Sidi-Malik and the quartermaster-sergeant of spahis, who were then acting as scouts.

The temperature was unbearably hot. The command had halted under a wood of fig trees for the noon meal and

the following siesta. D'Ornano had chosen this halting-place with some care. Not only did it afford shade and cover, but it commanded the immediate surroundings. Behind rose the wooded mountain land in the midst of which they had travelled since dawn. In front, shut in also by wooded hills, a gently sloping stretch of ground, covered with thapsias and palmettos, was crossed by the dry bed of a torrent. Aïn-Guergour was still nine kilometres distant. The plain, although of little extent, was large enough for the evolutions of cavalry. D'Ornano suspected that Bou-Amel's horsemen would pour upon him the minute he would reach the opposite foot-hills; but he did not expect the attack so soon. Bou-Amel's trap was well laid. Had the Corsican commander trusted himself to the opposite bank of the torrent, a charge of cavalry would have stopped him on the brink, forcing him to recross in disorder. The *wadi*, as is generally the case in the alluvial plains of North Africa, had burrowed its bed deep into the red earth. As the bridge had been blown up, crossing this small-sized canyon would have broken the hollow square formation and imperilled the guns. Threatened also by the infantry which swarmed on the hillsides, the column would have been surrounded, dislocated, swept into the river-bed and annihilated almost before it could fire a shot.

The enemy had succeeded in keeping so perfectly under cover that the sight of two horsemen coming back at full gallop attracted the attention of the whole command. A cloud of dust behind them indicated that cavalry was in pursuit. Bou-Amel, knowing that the game was up, had changed his tactics. Fully three thousand men came be-

hind the fugitives. And they were so close upon their heels, that d'Ornano hesitated, wondering if he would not have to shell his own men in order to stop the pursuers.

The necessity for this did not arise, thanks to Sidi-Malik's skill in choosing, before crossing the wadi, a point where the banks of the torrent, undermined by the swift current, had fallen into the bed. But what two men could accomplish successfully was impossible for a body of cavalry. D'Ornano saw his chance to turn the tables. Ordering his men to rally around him, he moved as fast as he could towards the torrent and immediately formed a hollow square enclosing his animals, baggage, cannon and machine-guns. The struggle which followed lasted an hour and twenty minutes. Bou-Amel's cavalry, broken three times, rallied on each occasion behind fresh squadrons, and finally managed to cross on the bodies of its own dead. They then closed in upon all sides, and for a few minutes the contest took the form of a hand-to-hand fight that precluded the use of artillery. The foe literally leaped to die upon bayonet points. The square, assaulted on all sides, was unable to open itself for a discharge of artillery, without running at the same time the risk of being severed and broken up. The action became a scrimmage where yatagan met bayonet. Moslems, fallen under their mounts, were dragged from the saddle and promptly despatched. Their bodies soon formed a barrier in front of the column. D'Ornano owed to this that he was, at last, enabled to use his machine-guns. The rattling of the deadly engines had not lasted two minutes, when Bou-Amel's cavalry, routed, completely decimated, scattered to the four corners of the compass.

It had been a close shave; but the point was carried. Master of the ground he stood upon, d'Ornano looked at his work. He had littered the plain with corpses. He had yet, it is true, to deal with innumerable infantry, but at least he could see around and use his guns.

The crossing of the torrent was accomplished in good order and without great losses. A dogged, slow but steady advance began. Twice cavalry reappeared. They were stopped at eight hundred yards. From the hills, now steep on both sides of the road, a continuous fire of infantry hampered progress. Nevertheless, Bou-Amel's troops were slowly retreating towards the plain of Egris. At five o'clock the column came within sight of Aïn-Guergour.

Although, to all practical purposes, d'Ornano now held the pass, he fully realized that enough Moslems remained behind him to prevent small parties from getting water. A little further on, a very large farmhouse stood on the hill-side. In all probability there was a well there; perhaps wine-casks remained in the cellars. If he could carry the position he would enjoy, among other advantages, that of being able to house his wounded in more comfortable quarters. Against natives without artillery, masonry walls constituted also a bulwark not to be despised. He looked the ground over attentively and then faced his troop. A number of them had fallen. Enough remained, however, to carry the farm by a rush. But the wounded could not be abandoned, even momentarily; and to carry them along during the assault would deprive the attack of the requisite impetus. A party of sharp-shooters would have to do the work. D'Ornano thought with a smile that there would

never be a better opportunity to give Capo di Borgo the choice between death, a captaincy or the cross.

As he turned around to look for his countryman, he caught sight of Leyton and Gisèle. The painter, a rifle in his hand, and black with powder, like everybody else, was wiping his brow on the girl's apron.

D'Ornano bit his lip and wheeled around. He spoke to the bugler. The man put his brass to his mouth and blew a few notes. Firing ceased instantly.

"Better get under cover of the fig trees, fellows," said the Corsican. "There is no longer any need for a square. Get the wounded under shelter, lie down and show me some sharp-shooting."

The command was quickly obeyed, the men scattering in all directions. Gunners alone kept their posts. D'Ornano called Captain Jarchin.

"You are to assume command, Jarchin," he said. "I shall myself take the farm with twenty men. When you see us in, bring the column. But no hurry. You know what this warfare means, I believe. All prisoners will be tortured and mutilated. See that you have everybody with you; and, if I leave men on the ground, be sure you pick them up. Instruct Lesueur to cease shelling the minute he sees us rise from the ground and start on a rush."

"Risky business," Jarchin said simply. "You are endangering the life of the officer in command. Why don't you give the job to a lieutenant?"

"No lieutenant can do it with less than fifty men."

"All right; but I am not convinced. Whom do you take with you?"

"Have the bugler call for silence. I shall choose them myself."

The bugler blew the "cease firing" and the "rally." The men came running from all sides. Jarchin made them take their ranks. He then instructed a sergeant to call the roll. As the non-commissioned officer summoned each man by name, the Captain checked the results in his notebook. D'Ornano, smoking, was looking towards the farm.

"Eighty-five dead; one hundred and two disabled; three missing," Jarchin reported.

"All right. We can't afford to lose many more," said the Corsican, turning back. Then he added more loudly, with a smile: "We need that farm, fellows. I want twenty volunteers."

Instantly, Legionaries, Marsouins and Joyeux alike left the ranks and came forward. D'Ornano's smile became a laugh.

"I knew it," he commented. "As I cannot take you all, I will call the best shots. Take your ranks."

He began calling aloud:

"Maillot, Pobadjeski, Lemeneur, Pladec, Shwartz, O'Hara, Souvarine, Rholf, Kelly, van Bomsen, Etchegarray, Doolan, Castillo del Mar, de Plassieux, Thomlinson, Weinshwurtz, Heisermann, Grimaldi, Vouravief, Sidi-Malik."

His glance rested on Leyton. Then he turned about. The American came forward, white with anger.

"What about me?" he said. "Can't I shoot as straight as the others?"

"You are a non-combatant."

"By God! A non-combatant black with powder smoke! Was I a non-combatant the night we went together to the Kutubia? You took Sidi-Malik."

"Nobody will weep over Sidi-Malik."

"Oh, you go to blazes!" shouted the painter, losing all restraint. "You know damned well that it is not I who will cause much weeping."

D'Ornano made no reply. His glance again sought Gisèle. The young woman was looking in his direction with widened eyes, a mute statue of appeal. The Corsican turned quietly away, just in time to see O'Hara push his elbow in Leyton's ribs. He heard the extraordinary comment:

"Holy Mother of Moses! Is it that you and our man is suffering from the cafard?"

The query made d'Ornano blink. However, no other sign of his confusion appeared on his face. He looked his men over and asked:

"Ready?"

"I see you leave the Marsouins behind, Commandant d'Ornano?" said Jarchin, somewhat pointedly. "The Joyeux and the Turcos, I understand; but we are with you since the beginning."

"I don't know the Marsouins as well as my own men, that's all," the Corsican explained. "Name five and I take them."

Jarchin named five. The challenged men came forward. A prouder set of beings it was impossible to behold.

"Now, boys, from tree to tree, until I order you to lie down. Sergeant Ruiz, let me have your rifle. So long, Jarchin."

“Good luck, Commandant.”

They were gone. They jumped from fig tree to fig tree until they reached the open. At the edge of the wood the dangerous part of the undertaking began. The farm stood clear of the trees, on an eminence overlooking the surrounding ground. The Moslems who held it were assuredly poor shots, but they were behind walls. The sharp-shooters advanced *en tirailleurs*, by dashes, gaining a few yards at a time, then lying down behind their knapsacks to empty their magazines, reload and await another chance. While lying flat, they were able to pick off all who dared show their skulls above the top of the walls. But, unfortunately, the house, like all South Algerian buildings, was provided with loop-holes, and was therefore easily defended against a few men.

Before he had left the wood fifty yards behind, d’Ornano saw four of his companions wounded. Two men were dangerously hurt and had to be abandoned. The other two were able to continue. A fifth man, Kelly, was killed outright in the middle of the next dash. Soon afterwards the turn of Pladec came. D’Ornano had still two hundred yards to cover before reaching the walls, and eight of his men had been hit, two were dead, three were disabled and one was dying. He ordered a rest, thinking that death was doing its work a little too fast.

There was still a possibility that the advance would prove easier on the opposite side. The gate they were now facing was intact and apparently locked, while the Moslems, in entering the premises, had very likely broken the back entrance open. Calling to Sidi-Malik, O’Hara, Etchegarray and Vouravief to follow him, d’Ornano went

to reconnoitre on that side. Crawling to avoid bullets, the five men managed to come unscathed into view of the other gate.

It was open. The heavy panel, torn from its hinges by a crow-bar, hung outside. D'Ornano had just ordered Sidi-Malik, to go back and tell the other men that the position might be carried more easily on that side, when he heard the crash of a shell on solid wood. A blast followed. The front gate had gone to splinters.

Sidi-Malik had now reached a position which enabled him to grasp the scene in its ensemble. The well-known yell of Leyton made him raise his head, and, for the space of thirty seconds, he beheld the painter, Rholf, van Bomsen, Weinshwurtz and de Plassieux running like mad in the direction of the breach. Almost at the same moment he saw the Moslems leave the farm. He raised a shout of warning. He shot once, twice, and then started to run, but all to no avail. When he reached the place occupied a minute before by d'Ornano, O'Hara, Etchegararay and Vouravief, the three last, shot or stabbed, were dead and the Corsican was a prisoner.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE THOUGHTS OF THE NIGHT-WATCH

Moghrib! Bou-Amel's Saharans lay down their arms and turned towards Mecca for prayer. In the departing light, these were minutes of tragical rest for the defenders of the farm. Touches of color still lingered in the fast-darkening sky. At the base of the circle of blue mountains, the bivouac fires of Bou-Amel's army were lighting. From the terraced roof, where he had gone with a spy-glass to study the enemy's position, Captain Jarchin heard Maillot throw in clear notes to the night's stillness:

Des marches d'Afrique,
J'en ai plein le dos.
On y va trop vite.
On n'y boit que d'eau.

He smiled. After d'Ornano's capture he had feared discouragement. But the men were singing; they would fight. Woven on the Arab tune of the *danse du ventre* the chorus burst forth, taken up by the whole troop:

Travaja la muqueir,
Travaja bono.

After a silence of ten seconds, Maillot's voice was heard again:

Des lauriers, des victoires,
De ce songe illusoire
Que l'on nomme la gloire,
J'en ai plein le dos.

Then the chorus again and the Arab tune:

Bono bezef la muqueir,
Travaja bono.

And much more, untranslatable, in Mediterranean *sabir*, an atrocious mixture of Maltese, Spanish, Arabic and French. It was sad, on the whole, and expressive of the men's weariness. For a century past, they and their predecessors had trampled this African land, fought for every inch of ground, put down countless rebellions, marched from the Pyramids to Mogador. Always they had suffered from thirst, often they had been starved. And the result was this, the story of Sidi-Brahim over again. Little wonder, then, if of laurels and victories, of encounters and glory, they felt they had had their fill.

Jarchin knew that it was not for themselves as much as for d'Ornano that they grieved. His capture after such labors they regarded as an injustice of fate. Indeed, he had himself come very near asking of the Powers the trite question, "What's the use?" He suspected that even the Marsouins, his own men, were disposed to consider that, in assuming the authority formerly held by d'Ornano, he reaped the benefit of a *coup* planned and carried out by another far worthier than himself. But he knew also that such is the philosophy of war. Beginning with Kleber and down the course of history, the heroes of African campaigns, after a career of success achieved against odds, have often met with an obscure, often a hideous death. The thought of what the future held in store for him made his smile a little sadder. Who cares for the exiles waging colonial warfare? The stay-at-homes, well-fed, well-

housed beings as they are, do not reckon with malaria and pestilence. In ten years d'Ornano would be forgotten by all except the officers of his own regiment. By that time he, Jarchin, would probably be ready to die of fever in some swamp of Upper Bornou or Siam. Another man would in turn reap the profits of his toil. This newcomer would step into his shoes, would bury him, would talk of duty to the men and would go merrily along, until snake-bite or other cheerful accident of the same kind would stop him half-way to the Valhalla of his dreams and bestow on another man the task of carrying the French flag further and further still up the Oubanghi or the Menam.

His examination of the enemy's position completed, he made ready to go down. It was getting cooler. The north wind, which had risen at sundown, had driven away the suffocating heat. As he reached the stairs he passed Leyton and Sidi-Malik. The American was looking dreamily towards the wooded mountains. Jarchin hurried by with a grave salute. He knew that the painter nursed a grief of his own, but it was not at this moment that his sympathy could lighten another man's burden.

Sidi-Malik, in a frenzy of rage and grief, with the unaccountable violence of Oriental grief, had made the painter acquainted with the story of d'Ornano's capture. He had not spared him a detail of the torment in store for the Corsican, pitiless in his frightful description of what the poor flesh would have to endure before death would be allowed to do its merciful work. Leyton knew that his friend would to-morrow be a nameless thing, a shapeless body still alive. And it was upon him that the task of breaking the news to Gisèle had fallen.

A premonition of coming disaster had contracted the heart of the young woman at the moment her eyes caught d'Ornano's last glance. Careless of the shelter provided by the tree trunks, she had made an attempt at following the storming party, savagely scratching Capo di Borgo who had been compelled to use force to hold her back. Upon the painter who, later in the afternoon, had found her in a state of feverish excitement, almost on the verge of nervous collapse, she had heaped accusations and reproaches. It was due to him if, immediately after the departure from Figuig, d'Ornano's susceptibilities had been wounded; to him if a misunderstanding had arisen; to him if, in the foolhardiness born of his jealousy, the Corsican had conceived the plan of capturing the farm with an insufficient number of men.

Since then the American could not bring himself to speak. Too generous to argue the point, he had preferred to admit that he had acted the part of the interloper. All the irritation he had felt against d'Ornano was now gone and he suffered keenly from the thought that the last words he had exchanged with his friend had been charged with rancor. It seemed as if the approach of death, wiping out the remembrance of an injustice, had also dimmed the image of the woman who had stood between the Corsican and himself. The scenes of torture evoked by Sidi-Malik had contracted his throat. Damn it all! Sidi-Malik had sworn to disembowel the one-eyed chieftain and fill his belly with stones. Could it be that civilized conventions could prevent him, Leyton, from joining the Berber and, if opportunity came, from properly avenging his friend? His was not the mood for nice distinctions. His ferocity

was aroused. He felt, leavening in his bosom, surging and threatening, countless ancestral longings, the accumulated hatreds of primeval progenitors.

Sleep came to Sidi-Malik as his companion was still brooding. Stars arose, ascended and disappeared. The freshness and fragrance of the night increased with the flight of the hours. Twice Leyton heard the chorus of Moslems in prayer. Bivouac fires dwindled and died on the hillsides. A wonderful silence, the quiet of countries where man is weaker than nature, slowly glided down from the hilltops, settled over the battle-field and dispensed the freshness of dew to the parched dead lips blackened and swollen in the sunshine. For a while the smell of dead flesh which has not yet begun to decay, the mawkish effluvia of bloodless meats which permeates slaughter-houses, lost itself in the strong wind. His jaws set and his unseeing eyes fixed straight ahead, the American kept on indulging in thoughts of torments and death. Books had made him acquainted with the hellish ingenuity of tormentors. Crucifixion, scalp-taking, horse-quartering, elephant-trampling; it was hard which to choose for Bou-Amel. Chinese refinements of cruelty seemed especially devised to rack the Saharan chieftain to the pitch of exquisite agony. Hair-plucking, nail-tearing must also be delightful and reasonably safe. With care, death would be avoided a long time. And then there were Assyrian and Carthaginian tortures: Moloch, resplendent with white heat, filling the temple with the smoke and smell of burning flesh. There was the cask filled with nails in which the body was made to roll downhill. There were also the wheel, the brodequin, all the torments born of inquisitorial insanity.

Had he been able to take a healthy view of his case, he would not have failed to despise himself.

The dawning of another day brought him work enough to compel the temporary setting aside of morbid fancies. Beginning at sunrise, Bou-Amel, who evidently had some reason for hurry, made a determined attempt to gain possession of the farm. All day long he pushed forward tribe after tribe, goum after goum. From besiegers the French had become besieged. Protected by strong walls, their task was comparatively an easy one; but everybody had to take a rifle, even the hospital attendants. Only twice in thirteen hours, when the farm was too closely pressed, did Captain Lesueur bring his guns into action, and this only to clear the open space between the fig trees and the buildings. Ammunition for cannon was fast running short, and Jarchin, mindful that in the near future a time would come when he would have to strain every nerve to complete Bou-Amel's defeat, had decided in favor of a policy of economy. Ammunition for rifles and machine-guns he had in plenty; but the caissons told another story. Moreover, so long as he would have to deal with a foe who approached under cover of a wood, it was best to rely on the skill of his marksmen.

Bou-Amel's losses were in direct proportion to the number of men he brought in the field. He was either too impatient, too distrustful of his followers as individual fighters or too ignorant of modern methods to attempt to recover the farm by the process d'Ornano had employed to gain it. He either believed in the tactics of attacks in mass or thought that he had lives to spare. The slaughter the besieged made of his men proved so frightful that

Jarchin began to conceive serious fears. At three o'clock in the afternoon he directed that nobody should continue to shoot to kill. The number of corpses was now so great and the stench which arose from the *campi putridi* so fetid that it was a question whether the defenders would not have, two or three days hence, to leave the farm and take their chance in the open rather than face the horrors of a pestilence. Bou-Amel had neglected to remove even bodies which were well within his reach. The fact was significant. Moghrabis have such respect for their dead, and burial, in ordinary conditions, follows death so closely, that the carelessness displayed in this instance warranted the suspicion that the Maddhi, finding himself unable to enter the farm by stealth or main force, had deliberately planned to infect the atmosphere breathed by the small body of defenders.

Questioned as to his ability to deal with pestilence by resorting to chemicals, Farlède shrugged his shoulders. He had nothing but chloride of lime. This he used liberally, to everybody's discomfort. But the inadequacy of the palliative became evident as soon as the breeze began to blow from the north, as it did every evening. The day had been hot, and the stench was at sunset absolutely nauseating. Farlède explained that the horrible smell was, however, less a danger than an inconvenience. Besieged cities had borne with putrefaction for a considerable length of time. As long as the men would have pure water and a sufficient allowance of healthy food and sleep, they would find in themselves the means of combating disease. Fly-bites, liable to cause blood-poisoning, were alone to be dreaded. He cautioned the men against carelessness,

enjoining them to come to him and submit to the knife for the least sting; meanwhile, he took every precaution he could think of to rid the farm of insect life.

At one o'clock in the morning every man had to get up to repulse a night attack. It was short, shorter perhaps than the encounter of the preceding night, but of unusual fierceness. The recklessness with which Bou-Amel threw lives away caused Jarchin to marvel. He admitted, with something amounting to envy, that no Caucasian troops would put up with such losses and return so doggedly to the attack. How Bou-Amel, after such a series of unparalleled disasters, managed to keep his hold on the minds of his people puzzled him. The eloquence of the chieftain must be of the highest order to command among his sectaries such unshaken belief in ultimate success. Although this was the first time Jarchin fought on North African soil, he had in the course of the campaign collected enough data to gain at least a partial comprehension of the Moslem. He knew that these people, always prompt to answer a call to arms, readily resign themselves to defeat, believing that Allah is punishing them for their sins. Bou-Amel's Moslems, however, evinced a stubbornness of purpose and a loftiness of spirit which would have done credit to any Caucasian troops. Was the reason to be sought in the fact that the Saharan chieftain had convinced his followers that they would exhaust the strength and patience of their foes; or was it that the fierce spirit of the never-tamed Berber had at last engendered a racial consciousness, a national awakening?

The rest of the night passed without alarms. Jarchin, the last to leave the walls, felt so utterly exhausted that,

before lying down for a well-earned rest, he gave orders that he was not to be disturbed for anything short of an attack. As a consequence, when daylight returned, he was not told that the wood of fig trees had been evacuated by the besiegers. Lieutenant Capo di Borgo, then in command, made the discovery. A quick survey of the surroundings assured him that the evacuation of the wood did not imply that Bou-Amel had at last resolved to move on Mascara, for he still occupied all his positions at the entrance of the pass. However, it spoke eloquently of the chieftain's weariness. Of course, the Moslems would return; but, as long as they kept away, the defenders could sleep. Taking upon himself the responsibility for the act, di Borgo posted new sentries, undertaking at the same time to fill Serral's place for the next two hours.

Gradually the sun rose, eating little by little the patches of blue shade still loitering at the bottom of the glens on the hillsides. Behind the farm, the rolling ground was a perfect solitude of palmettos and thapsias. In front, the pass of Aïn-Guergour afforded a glimpse of the foot-hills beyond which stood Cachrou and the plain of Egris. The main body of Bou Amel's army was encamped there, unable to retreat southward and unwilling to trust itself to the flat country lying to the north. At six o'clock Capo di Borgo caught sight of a white speck issuing from the shadow which filled the pass. A quarter of an hour went by. The speck became two horsemen and a man on foot. They disappeared a minute in a gully. When he saw them again, they were within rifle range, and one of the horsemen was waving a piece of white cloth. The Lieutenant ran for a spy-glass.

When he came back the newcomers had nearly reached the fig trees. At this distance it was not even necessary to use a glass to make sure that they carried a flag of truce. The two horsemen were natives. But the Lieutenant's heart gave a leap as he recognized the third man.

"*Cosa c'e? Corpo di Christo!*" he ejaculated in Corsican dialect. . . . "Pobadjeski, go and call Captain Jarchin. Wake everybody. You, Weinshwurtz, blow me the proper tune. I don't care which, but be sure you raise the dead. Lord, O Lord! I guess I'll get drunk after this!" He made an irruption among the sleepers, shouting as he went, "Wake up, there, you loafers, or I kick. Wake up! Wake up! Commandant d'Ornano is coming back!"

Weinshwurtz, thinking it would only be proper to call the officers first, took up the tune of the "Critique," blowing like mad:

Lieutenants, Capitaines, Commandants,
L'Colonel vous attend;
L'Colonel vous attend.

He made the reveille, then the roll-call, follow this. Lavardie, a trumpeter of artillery, had by this time collected his wits. He sent flying up in the bright morning sky the jubilant notes of the "Boots and Saddles":

Allons, artilleurs vite en selle.
Formez vos joyeux escadrons.
Que chacun embrasse sa belle;
Et vite, à cheval, nous partons.
Et vite, à cheval, nous partons,
A cheval, nous partons.
A cheval, nous partons.

Meanwhile, Weinshwurtz was going through an unlimited number of performances, summoning the sergeants and

blowing the calls to "Arms" and "Fire." Lavardie bethought himself that all this still left the doctor and the hospital men out. He took up the "Visite":

Non, monsieur le Major,
 J'n'irai plus,
 J'n'irai plus courir la prétontaine.
 Non, monsieur le Major,
 J'n'irai plus,
 J'n'irai plus courir quand j'ai trop bu.

He was barely through when Captain Jarchin, only half clad, made his appearance in the court-yard. He had his look of stormy days. Di Borgo stiffened and came to attention. Men were now pouring in from all parts.

"What in thunder does this mean, Capo?" snapped the Captain. "Have these idiots gone mad, or have you?"

"Mad? Not I," the Lieutenant retorted. "I sent Pobadjeski to tell you that Commandant d'Ornano was coming back."

Jarchin had not seen Pobadjeski. He stopped dead.

"What's that? D'Ornano coming back, did you say?"

"Dislodge that gun and open that gate, men!" di Borgo resumed. "You will see for yourself, sir."

In a twinkling the heavy panels swung around. Jarchin passed the gate. There, sure enough, at the edge of the wood, stood d'Ornano. He was alone; the two horsemen had been left on the road. The Corsican made a friendly gesture and began climbing the slope. A rousing cheer went up.

CHAPTER XXIX

A CORSICAN REGULUS

When its echo had died the Captain raised his arm and shouted, "*Rassemblement!*" The men took their ranks. Order and expectant silence prevailed. D'Ornano came climbing slowly, as uncertain in his progress as a drunken man. Jarchin saw at a glance that something was wrong. He frowned. A sickly smile illuminated the features of the Corsican when he came abreast of the first men. He saluted. Fifteen seconds later he passed the gate.

"Send the men away, Jarchin," he said, "and have them prepare for parade. Captain Lesueur will see that they are ready in an hour. Come with me. I have to speak to you. Where is Leyton?"

"Still asleep, I suppose; although I don't see how he can manage it. De Plassieux, go and fetch me Mr. Leyton." They went a few steps in silence "Good God! man, what's the matter with you? You seem entirely worn out."

D'Ornano sighed and shook his head.

"Oh, I won't be worn out long," he replied. "How do you suppose a man feels when he has been without sleep for fifty-two hours—it was at twelve, you remember, that I took the watch—and has been made to walk the ground between two horsemen for the last thirty-six?"

"For Heaven's sake!" Jarchin exclaimed. "Is this what Bou-Amel kept in store for you? Then you must not stay here. Come up-stairs and lie down. I will postpone the parade. Let me help you. I will have my bed ready for you in a moment."

"Thanks. But I am afraid that, much as I would enjoy it, I cannot sleep yet. I passed my word. . . . Ah, here comes Leyton! And Sidi-Malik, too, bless my soul!"

The painter's glance betrayed so much wonder and apprehension, as he critically eyed his friend, that d'Ornano laughed.

"Good-morning, Leyton," he said cheerfully. "You need not look at me like that. I am still whole. Did you believe I had risen from the dead? . . . *Salaam aleikoum*, thou Sidi-Malik, son of Hachem. No, Bou-Amel has not tortured me yet, and we will break his neck to-morrow. Thou wilt learn later what he did to me; Leyton will tell. *Rohfissa*, now! I have to speak to the Captain and to Sidi Leïtoun."

A native never discusses orders; so Sidi-Malik went. The three men went up-stairs and entered the room Jarchin shared with Captain Lesueur. There were two beds, a kitchen table and two chairs. D'Ornano took one of these, offering the second to Leyton. Jarchin repaired hastily the disorder of his toilet and sat down on one of the beds. For a minute they kept silent, the painter and the Captain scrutinizing the impassible face of the Corsican.

"I suppose, Jarchin," d'Ornano said at length, "that I cannot make a better beginning than by congratulating you for the stubbornness of your defence. Were I a little less tired, I might criticise it point by point and end by

complimenting you on all your moves. As it is, I have seen the results, and they are better than I hoped for. I suppose you managed to bring all your wounded inside the defences?"

"Yes, Commandant. Every one of them."

"How many men have you lost since my capture?"

"Three killed; twelve wounded. One of these will die; the others will recover, if I am to believe Farlède. We are taking unusual precautions against infection."

"Under the present conditions it is wise. Happily, your plight will not be of long duration. What about ammunition and food?"

"We still have four days' rations, not counting hard-tack. We found a good many things here. Rifle ammunition we have in plenty, and this will also do for machine-guns. As for shells, I am sorry to say that there are not enough of them to fire two hundred shots."

"Oh, it is not so bad, then. I was afraid there was nothing left. Keep all you can. You will need all you can spare before thirty-six hours."

"Why? Have you any reason to believe that another attack will be made?"

"I don't think so. Bou-Amel is crippled for good. Next time you fight you will do the attacking."

There was another silence. Jarchin broke it.

"I confess, d'Ornano, that I do not understand," he said. "What do you mean by 'you will need all you can spare'? 'You will do the attacking'? Am I to infer that you are not going to resume command? Surely that rogue has not poisoned you?"

The Corsican's smile reappeared. "As yet, he has not,"

he admitted; and he added, as if the thing was of no consequence, "But I am going back."

Jarchin was thunderstruck. "Going back?" he said. "Why?"

Instead of the direct answer he anticipated, a sarcasm came.

"Look at the map, Jarchin. This country is, has been and will be Moghrib for a long time, even if you don't know it. Where did you get the notion that Bou-Amel is the man to let go what has once fallen into his clutches. Sidi-Malik might post you on that subject. What do you think I came here for?"

"I have been asking myself that question for the last quarter of an hour."

"Well, I was sent to offer you terms. Provided you deliver into Bou-Amel's hands Leyton, Sidi-Malik and Mlle. de Diolie, and bind yourself not to hamper the retreat of the Moslem troops, I resume command. Is this clear?"

Jarchin stared at him in blank astonishment.

"Surely," he said, "you did not come here to tell me that?"

"Perhaps not. Nevertheless, I would like to know what Leyton has to answer."

Under his searching glance, the American paled first, then became very red. However, he quickly recovered his composure.

"Come on, d'Ornano," he said gently. "No such jokes between us. I know you did not come here to barter away the lives of your friends and the honor of a woman. And you know just as well that, personally, I stand ready

to share your risks. I will let Sidi-Malik make the same answer for himself. If I can help you in anything, tell me how. What do you expect from us?"

The Corsican stood up, no longer weary,—transfigured. He unpinned the cross of the Legion d'Honneur which shone on his breast.

"From you, Leyton," he said slowly, "that you will carry this to my father, in Calvi, with the undying love of his son. From Sidi-Malik, that he will recover and bury my corpse. From Jarchin and my men that they will avenge me. I am going back to Bou-Amel."

The three of them were up now. Leyton, deadly pale, took the cross without a word. The Captain was purple with emotion and anger. He kicked the table so violently in one leg that he knocked it down.

"Thunder and damnation!" he roared. "What is this comedy? Are you crazy? Why in hell did you pass your word to that scoundrel? Do you believe that I will be bound by that? You stay here, d'Ornano. Even if I have to put you in irons to accomplish my purpose, I will manage to keep you here. The men will obey me in as clear a case of attempted suicide as this."

"And you will be court-martialled for it, Captain Jarchin," snapped the Corsican. "Let me remind you that you are about to disregard the orders of a superior."

"I have no superiors here," Jarchin retorted. "I am in command since your capture. You came here to treat. I decline your terms and I deal with you as I please. If I break faith with somebody, that is my own business, not yours. Technically, you are a prisoner of war."

It was d'Ornano's turn to pale. There was a silence. Tears of humiliation came in his eyes. But before he had shed them, Jarchin caught hold of both his hands.

"Forgive me," he pleaded. "I did not mean that, and I should not have said it. I apologize. I shall only be too glad to see you resume command at once. Just tell me that you are not going back."

"I am going back, since I gave my word."

"You gave it under pressure," interrupted Leyton. "It is not binding."

"That's casuistry," the Corsican replied. "I would have to admit that pressure can be brought upon me, which I deny. Being what I am, a Corsican, I am the master of a free will. We have traditions in my island. A word passed is a word passed, no matter where nor under what circumstances."

"You have only the mistaken notions of honor prevalent among your kin," the American replied bitterly. "I am enough your friend to tell you this without giving offence. Your so much vaunted honor reduces itself to exaggerated egotism. All Corsicans would fain give their lives to earn the right of worshipping themselves. Wake up, and try to judge sanely for once, you fool. Do you fail to realize that the saying of Kipling is true of your kind: 'there is too much ego in your cosmos'?"

"Perhaps there is. We do not claim to be angels in Corsica. We are men."

"But that is not even the point," Jarchin interrupted. "The fact is that you have engaged your faith to an enemy himself faithless. Bou-Amel was bound by the agreement entered into with Abd-er-Rhaman. He broke a truce.

Your going back in these conditions is an instance of gigantic tomfoolery, I call it."

"Hold on," interrupted d'Ornano. "That's casuistry again. I hold that we are bound to be faithful even in the presence of faithlessness. But there is something more. Bou-Amel warned me. I will not admit that he had not a perfect right to pursue a personal vendetta regardless of Abd-er-Rhaman's word. Furthermore, I wanted him to attack me. It afforded me a fine opportunity to lick him."

"Nevertheless, and although you deny it, you passed your word under compulsion. In your present physical condition you are not fit to make a binding engagement. The proof of my contention is easily given. No man of your character, holding personal honor in as high a regard as you do, would, in his normal state, carry such terms of surrender as you have done. I know that you never intended that a bargain should be entered into, d'Ornano. Still, you gave Bou-Amel the satisfaction of believing that dishonorable terms might be accepted by us."

The Corsican's eyes flashed with anger, perhaps pride.

"You lie, Jarchin," he shouted frantically. "You lie, damn you, and you know it. No man who saw me at work as long as you did should speak such words. Yes, it is true that I was eager to come back, eager to see, before I died, what I had done to that camel. The rotten carcasses of his soldiers smell awfully good to me, by God! It is true that I wanted to give my cross to Leyton. After all, I am also a man, and I have an old father. But all this I should have foregone had not a stronger reason brought me here. Abd-er-Rhaman is beaten. I came to tell you *that*."

A dead silence followed. Jarchin hid his face.

"Come on, Jarchin," d'Ornano resumed. "It is my turn to apologize. I had no sooner spoken than I realized that you never meant to insult me."

"Let it go at that, then," the Captain replied. "We have much to forgive each other to-day, I am afraid. What about Abd-er-Rhaman?"

D'Ornano smiled. His tone instantly fell on a lower key, and he resumed in his usual mild manner:

"The knowledge of his defeat came to me from the lips of a woman. I already told you something of Djeïlma, I believe. Leyton and Sidi-Malik can tell you more about her. As she is much interested in our friend here, she managed to have me brought by the chaouchs to the place where she waited. Now she wants Bou-Amel murdered or tortured. He had her beaten, because she made an attempt to escape, and she wants Leyton to go to her rescue. I gave her hope in strong doses. In return, I enjoyed two hours comparative rest and I learned what I wanted. She is a regular little witch."

"What did she have to say about the battle in progress?" insisted the Captain.

"Many things that surprised me. Si-Hamza is doing well, if I am to believe her story. This is probably due to the extreme mobility of his cavalry. But General des Essarts stopped his advance between Les Aïssias and Aïn-Farès. General Dusseau, on the other hand, has checked Abd-er-Rhaman at Crèvecœur. General Pellegrin, coming from Perregaux, threatens him in the rear and will compel a retrograde movement. I also believe that General Marchel is coming with troops from Relizane,

Mostaganem and Arzew. This will compel Si-Hamza to turn back."

"And what will happen next?"

"Next! . . . Marchel and Pellegrin will execute a turning movement to compel Abd-er-Rhaman to retreat by way of Mercier-Lacombe. If Dusseau is wise, he will strain every nerve to occupy the Traria road, to the west of us."

"And we will have Bou-Amel and Si-Hamza caught between des Essarts, Dusseau and ourselves. Good! This is glorious. We hold the road!"

"You do, Jarchin, and not a rascal will return home. I may be as good as dead; yet nobody can take from me the glory of having planned the move. I am going to do what I can to help you win to-morrow's fight. I may be able to fire the men with new courage. Call them, will you?"

Again the Captain hesitated.

"No," he said. "Think it over. You are not going back."

"I would go back if God Almighty stood on the road," the Corsican swore with a tremendous gesture. "Go, Jarchin. You would not have it said that Colonna d'Ornano ate his word to save his life."

The pride in the man's eyes was infernal. Seeing that no room was left for discussion, Jarchin went downstairs. Leyton and d'Ornano exchanged a long glance.

"I owe you an apology for my behavior of the day before yesterday," the Corsican resumed. "I also owe an apology to Mlle. de Diolie. Will you undertake to . . ."

He stopped, flushed to the ears. It seemed as if a

reference to the woman he loved could not pass this man's lips. Leyton's glance was very hard.

"You owe me nothing," he said, getting up with sudden violence. "I am sorry. I am awfully sorry I interfered. If I had remained in Figui, as I first intended, nothing of this would have happened. . . . It is hard to admit such things, but God knows that I had long ago ceased to entertain a hope. You never doubted that it was you that she loved, did you?"

D'Ornano made no answer.

"You won't see her, of course," resumed the American. "Yes, I understand. . . . She is not strong, and I believe it is best to refrain. Yet she will never pardon me if you go without saying good-by."

"She will understand that on your side also it was a sacrifice. And, besides, who knows? . . . Regrets are not eternal."

He bent his head. These were his last words. Leyton was struck dumb as he discovered that this man, starving for the love and admiration of posterity, was devoured by doubt and questioned not only the worth of his sacrifice but even the depth of feminine regrets. He followed him downstairs. As they appeared in the court-yard, they heard Jarchin's command of "*Garde a vous!*" The front gate had been left open. While the Captain marched his soldiers in and disposed them in two files lining both sides of the entrance, Leyton and d'Ornano stood motionless near the stairway. Jarchin's own company of Colonial Infantry was the one intrusted with the banner. The Captain placed the ensign-bearer in such a position that he would be the last man d'Ornano would pass in making his exit.

The command of "*Bayonette au canon*," with its subsequent clashing of steel, increased Leyton's pallor. Jarchin's voice was heard again, commanding "*Portez Armes*." D'Ornano turned to his friend. The painter shook from head to foot.

"And now," the Corsican said, "brace up like a man for old sake's sake. Remember the cross, will you? . . . And good-by. For now and forever. Don't be too hard on my father when you tell him the story. Don't be too hard on the poor girl . . ."

He felt a hand on his shoulder. He turned sharply. Gisèle stood before him.

As he took hold of her finger he quivered for the first time. She was the temptation. She was the snare Sidi-Malik's perspicacity had opened under his foot. He asked himself in dismay why the being he loved best in the world should also be the enemy of the last hour.

For it was the eternal duel that still went on, and he knew that victory could only be achieved against himself. The brutal idol he worshipped would have to triumph over this weakness. In so far as he was concerned, his renunciation had been made. But all souls do not equally accept the idea of sacrifice, and this woman had no other duty than love. For thirty seconds he remained still, his glance lost in her eyes. Then, very gently, he tried to free his fingers.

"You won't go, Monsieur d'Ornano?" she said appealingly. "You are not going?"

"How can I stay?" he answered. "You would not want me to pass for a coward?"

"But who would think of calling you a coward?" she

pleaded. "Does not everybody know you here? O God! it is not your duty to which you are listening; it is your pride." She turned to Leyton. "George, please. Leave us alone a moment. He must not go. I'll try. . . . You have no right, Monsieur d'Ornano. You must beware of self-love. Remember. It was your pride which made you treat me like a little girl whenever you came to our house in Marakesh. You did not like me to tease you. It was your pride that made you hold aloof at the beginning of our voyage. It was your pride that made you dissatisfied with me when we left Figuig. I know that you were not really jealous of George. You only thought that, even in the presence of strangers, I ought to act as if you were the only man in the world. And it was to prove to me that you were also the bravest among your soldiers that you undertook to capture the farm. As if I did not know! . . . If I could have foreseen the end, I would not have acted as I did. Yet you were wrong also. It was enough for you to know that I loved you. Why should you want me to see in you more than a man?"

D'Ornano made no answer. He again tried to free his hand.

"You have no right to leave me," she exclaimed despairingly. "You are not alone in the world. What am I to do when you are gone? Won't you think of me? . . . I did not give you my love quite unbidden. Did I not try to do as you wanted? Were you told that in the hospital I did not do all my duty? . . . Why should I let you go? Shall I weep my father and you at the same time? And why? Why? Why? Between now and the hour of death you will walk in your greatness; and I shall pay

your debt by a life of misery . . . Oh, please. You will not leave me alone? . . . You told me you were not sure of a future life, Monsieur d'Ornano. How could you then believe in glory? Remember your dream. 'The heroes are a name and a handful of ashes.' Is it for that that you will sacrifice both of us?"

"I love you and I am sorry," the Corsican replied. "I wish you could understand; but I have no hope you ever will. If I throw my life away, it is as a challenge to the beasts who feed close to the ground. I laugh at the stupid irony of the lesser gods; and I climb the heavens to sit among them and above them, the statue of my ideal. So much the worse for mankind if it takes a madman to believe in duty for duty's sake and in the sublimity of human will."

"But I did nothing to harm you. I was ready to repair in a measure the injustice of destiny. . . . Georgel!" she screamed. "Georgel . . . Please, Monsieur d'Ornano! . . . Don't let him go. Don't! . . . Oh, God!"

D'Ornano had torn himself away. Leyton reached the young woman in time to receive her fainting in his arms. The Captain had already taken place in the midst of his men. With dulled senses, the painter heard the voice of the Captain. It was faint this time, and came from afar, from the bottom of the nightmare that left him sick and strengthless, sweating with fear:

"Ouvrez le Ban!"

Bugles and drums he heard in his dream. Then they stopped. D'Ornano's clear voice brought him back to consciousness:

"Captains, lieutenants, non-commissioned officers and privates."

He waited. It seemed a century before the Corsican spoke again:

"Although a prisoner of war and, as such, without a voice in council, I shall presume to speak as your commander for the last time. Sent here on parole, I am going back to the camp of Bou-Amel. You will, in the name of the President of the Republic, acknowledge Captain Jarchin as your commander and obey whatever orders he thinks fit to give to insure the maintenance of discipline and the respect due to the tricolor standard."

He paused a second, then resumed:

"You know what the flag means, men. To most of you it stands for the embodiment of the dreams of childhood, the joys of the hearth, the patch of ground ploughed and reploughed by your fathers. To these it is the flag of Châlons, Tolbiac, Tours, Bouvines, Orléans, Rocroy, Denain, Fontenoy, Jemmapes and Valmy, to recall only the victories when the French, threatened in their very existence, rose in their might and bridled the spoilers. To others, and among these I count the foreign-born, it is a protection that has never failed. To all of us it is our pride. The flag we carried away with us from Figuig is still ours, and I trust that, by to-morrow, the men who fought around it will be entitled to add a new name to the victories written there in gold letters.

"I came to tell you that Abd-er-Rhaman is beaten; that to-morrow will see the beginning of the Moslem retreat. Knowing my life to be forfeited in any case, I availed myself of an opportunity to come here on parole and congratulate you on the result. The battle still in progress to the north of us will be won. You turned the tide.

You made victory possible by drawing upon you the full strength of Bou-Amel. Nine hundred you came and eight hundred you remain. Behold! the plain you command is strewn with the corpses of more than five thousand men.

"It is well, fellow-soldiers. I am proud of you. I lived long enough to know you well and I am bound to declare that there never existed a finer body of men. In Figuig, you gave the French armies time to concentrate. In Bou-Amel's rear you made Abd-er-Rhaman's success an impossibility. For this alone you should all wear on your breasts the cross of the Legion d'Honneur. The reward will soon come. But it is your luck, soldiers, your luck that more remains to be done. When, to-morrow, Bou-Amel, attacked by General des Essarts, will find himself compelled to leave his hole, you will strangle him like a fox.

"But you will do so for our flag, not for the satisfaction of your hatred. You will remember that the same flag protects the man who surrenders. Whatever be my fate, I adjure you to keep present in your memory that I always spared a fallen man and that, above all else, I would not have it said that d'Ornano, dying, urged his men to become the instruments of his revenge. If Bou-Amel sues for mercy, grant it, and do not dishonor your laurels.

"I leave you, my brothers, with a task undone. I am conscious of having fallen short of the mark; but this, for all its bitterness, is too common in warfare to deserve more than a passing regret. I do not grudge Captain Jarchin his laurels of to-morrow. He deserves them and more. I grudge him only your love, which will go to him

when I am gone, and when you know him better. Try to remember me, if you can. Do your duty, all your duty, and nothing but your duty. Good-by!"

Leyton was choking. He heard Jarchin commanding, "*Fermez le Ban,*" with an altered voice. Bugles and drums sounded again. Then came the sharp command and the clash of steel:

"*Presentez . . . armes!*"

D'Ornano was passing, erect, between two files of proffered weapons. His moving blue shadow trailing on the brown earth was something pitiful in its grotesqueness. The ensign-bearer lowered the banner at the Corsican's approach. D'Ornano stopped, saluted, then kissed the cloth and passed away in the sunny stillness.

"Maillot," commanded Jarchin, pointing to the tricolor which floated over the farm. "Go and lower the flag to half-mast as a sign of mourning."

He was fighting hard within himself, in deadly fear of losing his composure. All the men wept. But when he saw d'Ornano disappear under the fig trees he gave it up. Letting his sword fall, he leaned against the jamb of the gate and began to sob like a child.

CHAPTER XXX

SI-HAMZA REMEMBERS HIS OATH

"It is suicidal," said Jarchin, shrugging his shoulders. "You are a painter, not a scout. A two months' stay in the Sahara does not make you Sidi-Malik's equal in an undertaking of this kind. The fellow is conversant with nearly every North African dialect. He is swift of foot, handy with his knives, his resourcefulness has no limit and he seems to possess a real genius for disguise. Let him go alone then. There is no use in trying to keep him here. He is beside himself with frenzy, and if I don't allow him to pass the gate he will escape by knifing some of my men. But you are not quite deaf to the voice of reason, I imagine. What do you propose to do? You will only furnish Bou-Amel with another victim."

He saw Capo di Borgo coming to report on the round he had just made. The Lieutenant stopped a few yards away. Leaving Leyton, Jarchin went to him.

"Anything new?"

"I found Lamar-ben-Sliman asleep at his post," the Lieutenant replied. "I told him he would be court-martialled and so forth. All he did was to show me a bullet-hole in his left shoulder. What answer could I make to that? The wound is in the flesh and doesn't look dangerous; yet since last night he has lost at least two

pints of blood. Not knowing whether you would care to have him court-martialled, I sent him to Farlède."

"That was the only thing to do. . . . You will please awake Lieutenant Serral and send him to me. Since he has charge of the native troops, he must see to it that the injured are not allowed to conceal their wounds. I know it is not his fault; yet he might make his men strip after each skirmish. This would do away with this tendency to cheat. You understand that when he sends me men for guard duty I take it for granted that they are fit. Anything else?"

"Yes; and that's stranger still. Hauptmann, who was next to Ben-Sliman, told me that he saw two men leave the farm and make for the fig trees."

"He did not attempt to stop them?"

"He thought they had given the password. It was not until he was told that Ben-Sliman had been sleeping that it occurred to him that perhaps they had gone without orders."

"And naturally he did not recognize either of them? Happily, it doesn't matter." He turned to the American. "I think it was written that you would have to stay here, Leyton. It appears that Sidi-Malik and Anoun-Dialo have grown tired of waiting."

"But I beg your pardon," interrupted Capo di Borgo. "Anoun-Dialo has not left the farm. I just saw him."

Jarchin looked at him in amazement.

"Damn me if I thought there would be deserters at this stage," he exclaimed. "Some of your crazy Legionaries, I will wager! Send me Sidi-Malik and Anoun-Dialo at once. I want to see them with my own eyes. Also have

the sergeants call the rolls. We shall sift this business to the bottom."

Di Borgo disappeared in the stairway. It was now dusk. A long day of anxiety was drawing to its close. The setting sun, firing the western sky with its most gorgeous tones, seemed inclined to make amends for the foulness of the stench which permeated the air. The reek of putrefaction was now abominable; and Bou-Amel was the only one who did not seem inconvenienced. Ignorant of the danger threatening him, or confident in his ability to cope with emergencies, he still occupied all his positions behind the pass. For the last fifteen hours no fighting had occurred, and the day had passed in idleness on both sides. Now the breeze brought to the ears of the besieged the drone of fifes, derbukkhas and tom-toms.

With his spy-glass, Jarchin had begun a last survey of the surroundings, when he heard Farlède call him from below. He bent over. The young surgeon was asking him whether Leyton was with him.

"He is," replied the Captain. "Do you want to speak to him?"

"I merely want to ask him whether he knows what has become of Mlle. de Diolie. I have looked all over the farm and can't find her."

As he spoke the last words, Leyton leaned on the parapet.

"Is she not with you?" he inquired. "I have not seen her since twelve o'clock. The attendant told me she was resting and I did not want to disturb her. When did you miss her?"

"But just now. . . . Three-quarters of an hour ago she was here. I found her talking with Sidi-Malik."

The same thought struck Jarchin and the painter. They exchanged a quick glance.

"The strangest part of it," Farlède went on, "is that her garments have been left on the bed. I can't understand it."

Leyton understood perfectly. To leave the farm with the camel-driver, Gisèle had again dressed in the native garb. He plunged downstairs four at a time. Jarchin followed. They met Anoun-Dialo and Capo di Borgo as they reached the court-yard. Questioned on the subject of Sidi-Malik's whereabouts, the negro, by means of a shrug of the shoulders and a comical turn of the hand, expressed a total and prodigious disappearance. His gesture could not have been more expressive had he caught Sidi-Malik in the act of flying. The painter addressed him rudely.

"Go and get ready, thou fool! Since thou wert stupid enough to let them go, thou wilt now accompany me." He turned to Jarchin. "I don't suppose you will stop me now? Can you give me a guide? Among Serral's men you will easily find a fellow who knows the surroundings."

Jarchin went away. Five minutes later he came back, followed by a native sergeant. He found Leyton and the Yolof waiting impatiently near the gate. He asked them whether they had all they wanted.

"All, including rope," Leyton replied. "You can open the gate. I think it is dark enough."

With a hand-shake to Jarchin and Capo di Borgo, he went first. Then the two officers saw him jump backwards and pull his revolver. Simultaneously they heard his exclamation:

"Hold on, there! Hands up! . . . Ah, that's better!"

In his hurry to issue forth, Anoun-Dialo elbowed Jarchin so violently that he almost knocked him down. When he was, at last, able to take a peep outside, the Captain found himself confronted by a native. Leyton came forward, his grip tight on the fellow's neck. He exclaimed as he passed the gate with his captive:

"See here, Jarchin. Your sentries are all asleep, I suppose. How do you explain that this scoundrel reached the wall unchallenged?"

But the sequel proved still more bewildering to the Captain, who did not understand a word of Arabic. As soon as the gate was closed, Leyton relaxed his hold. He had no sooner done so than the prisoner, recovering the use of speech, addressed him in voluble Arabic. Although the American failed to understand, he recognized in the newcomer Muhamed-ben-Khadour, the Aïssaoui who had rescued Sidi-Malik from the clutches of Bou-Amel. The native extracted from the folds of his belt a much-handled piece of paper.

"From what I gather from his palavering," said di Borgo, "Si-Hamza has entrusted him with a message to d'Ornano. I believe there is something up."

"We shall soon find out," replied the American. "At present, d'Ornano is either Captain Jarchin or myself. We shall see. I know the man. You can leave him here. Anoun-Dialo will take care of him."

In Jarchin's room they found Captain Lesueur, lying on the bed and reading by lamplight. Without any other apology than a laugh from the painter, they took the lamp away and went to sit at the table. Si-Hamza's letter was in French and ran thus:

MY DEAR ADVERSARY:—

Alea jacta est. Although the legions sprang from the earth at the stamping of his foot, Pompey met to-day with his Pharsalia, and Caesar's name is Dusseau. Of course all this is your fault. But if that dog of a Bou-Amel had obeyed orders and respected a truce, nothing as bad as this would have happened. I scarcely know where to turn for support. I am cut off from Abd-er-Rhaman, who has begun to retreat; and I am threatened by four brigades under General des Essarts. My men want to surrender. They say that Allah is against them, and remind me that long ago I warned them that this would come to pass. They now remember that when they fought with instead of against the French, they were always victorious. The cold truth is that they are afraid of having to suffer a loss of territory as a penalty for rebellion. As the laxity of my own religious convictions unfits me for the part of the prophet, I let them talk and say nothing. You can have my sword. I would rather surrender to a friend than to General des Essarts who, years ago, insulted my father. I know where you lie and where you await me. I will be there to-morrow. Meantime, I am going to remember my oath. Bou-Amel is responsible for this and shall pay the price of his defection. Keep strict watch on the Frenda road. I shall attack him to-night.

MATRICULE No. 112. CAVALRY SQUADRON OF SAINT-CYR,
Père Système for the Class of Luang-Prabang.*

P. S.—Can you give me news of Leyton? He disappeared. I trust he did not fall into the hands of Bou-Amel.

“Whew!” whistled the painter. “A rather unexpected development, isn’t it? It is too bad poor d’Ornano is not here to accept Si-Hamza’s surrender. What are you going to do about it?”

Jarchin was already on the floor unpacking his kit. He

* The *père Système* of Saint-Cyr is the man who graduates last. On commencement day he gives a name to the class and delivers a humorous speech. The names given the graduating classes are usually inspired by the chief military event of the year.

came back with ink and stationery. The letter completed, he handed it to the painter:

Leyton is well and will probably see you to-night. He leaves the rarm with your messenger. I grieve to say that, two days ago, Major d'Ornano fell into Bou-Amel's hands. At eight o'clock this morning he was still alive, but since then we are in ignorance of his fate. I have every reason to fear that torture has been the reward of his heroism. We have just discovered that Sidi-Malik and Mlle. de Diolie have left us, in all likelihood with the design of attempting his rescue. See whether you cannot help them in their dangerous undertaking. It seems highly desirable that Sidi-Malik should be provided with the means of claiming the help of your secret agents. I would suggest that you send Muhamed in search of him.

For my part, I will hold the Frenda road. Should d'Ornano be rescued to-night, he will himself accept your surrender. If not, and in case it should be your wish to pay this last homage to a dead friend, I shall accept it in his name.

CAPTAIN JARCHIN.

"Good!" Leyton exclaimed after perusal. "Jarchin, you are a brick. I am off. If all goes well, we shall meet again to-morrow morning."

"You won't take my sergeant?"

"No, thanks. With Muhamed as a guide, I don't think I shall need him."

He ran downstairs, folding the message as he went. A minute later he passed the gate and, with Anoun-Dialo and Muhamed, began feeling his way in the dark.

CHAPTER XXXI

"THE PEN THAT WRITES WITHOUT INK"

This endless wait behind a lentisc bush seemed to Gisèle a century of agony. From time to time a white figure, shrouded in the burnous, emerged from the darkness. Whenever the thing occurred, she invariably mistook the on-comer for Sidi-Malik. A remnant of prudence impelling her to remain quiet in her hiding-place, she listened to the beating of her own temples, waiting for the stroller, who came climbing the mountain path, to stop and speak to her. And as he passed by, often with a song, the same sharp pang of disappointment gripped her heart.

The camel-driver had left her to go in search of d'Ornano. To the comparative relief she had enjoyed when she had left the farm in his company had succeeded a period of dejection even worse than the despondency she had experienced after d'Ornano's farewell. Hope she had then abandoned. Now hope was again alive. Although some of it went as the minutes flew by, enough of it remained to impel her to disregard all the dictates of prudence and start alone on her forlorn quest. She had reached the stage when anything seemed preferable to suspense. She had come to see d'Ornano a last time; and the yearning to leave her place of concealment became every minute more difficult to resist. She might have accepted with

dumb despair the certainty of his death; she was unable to bear the thought that he suffered in his flesh and that she was powerless to ease the agony of his last hour.

On the road, below her, she saw torches. A moment later she noticed that a caravan had filed into the path leading past her hiding-place. Luminous points were moving up and down. The light played on the many colored woollen textures of bassours. Negro servants were shouting orders. Long before the first camels came abreast, she recognized a *zmala* carrying the women and property of a chief of great tent, perhaps of Bou-Amel himself.

She crouched lower behind the lentisc bush. To her great surprise and alarm, the caravan came to a sudden stop immediately in front of her. She heard the excited voices of black slaves.

"Which way? . . . There are two paths. Which way, Sidi? . . . Where is Mustapha, our lord?"

The curtains of a bassour were jerked open. A woman shrouded in the haik showed herself in full light. She shouted to a servant:

"Tell Mustapha to come here. We must wait. The path leading to Fortassa is occupied by Khaïd-Glawi, who won't let us proceed; and the French hold the other road. Mustapha must come here with the guide. *Roh fissa!*"

She drew back, her small hand, covered with rings, still holding the curtain. Gisèle rose. This time the impulse was irresistible. She could not have mistaken that voice. Leaving her place of concealment, she crossed the path.

"Djeïlma!" she called.

No answer. The veiled form crouched in the darkest corner of the bassour and the curtain fell. One second



"The mad woman ! Inshallah !"



the young woman remained motionless and discountenanced.

"Dost thou know that Sidi-Malik is liable to be here at any time, Djeilma?" she resumed.

Again the curtain was jerked open. The Circassian bent forward.

"Who art thou?" she inquired.

"I thought thou wouldst recognize the voice. Didst thou so soon forget the cousin of Sidi Leïtoun?"

Quick as a flash, Djeilma attempted to grasp her. Forestalling her intention, Gisèle opened her haïk.

"The mad woman, Inshallah!" exclaimed the Circassian. "What art thou doing here?"

"What thou seest. I am waiting."

"Waiting for Sidi-Malik? . . . What is thy business in these parts?"

"We came to ascertain whether Sidi d'Ornano is dead or alive. I was told that thou didst speak to him last night. Is it true?"

"It is true."

"Where is he now?"

"He lives still. I will tell thee. Let me speak to Mustapha."

A eunuch was now standing at Gisèle's right side. In a few words the Circassian explained the situation as she conceived it. Khaïd-Glawi occupied the hill at the right of them; the French were on the left; Sidi-Malik could be expected at any time, and, even singly, he would be dangerous. To avoid him, it was best to proceed a little way on the path leading to Fortassa, and await there Si-Hamza's attack. As she spoke, a great light broke upon

Gisèle. Leyton had told her something of Mustapha. She knew that it was owing to the Circassian that he now occupied in Bou-Amel's zenana the position he had once filled in Muley-Hassan's harem. From the tone of the conversation, she was able to gather that the eunuch and the favorite were accomplices. The news that Si-Hamza was in the vicinity, ready to attack Bou-Amel, enabled her to grasp the true nature of this complicity. There was no doubt that the confederates, aware that the occupation of Aïn-Guergour by French troops sounded the knell of Bou-Amel's downfall, had struck a bargain amounting in substance to the understanding that the eunuch would loot Bou-Amel's treasure and that Djeïlma would undertake to save it from seizure. This she evidently proposed to accomplish by claiming Si-Hamza's protection, thinking that the young sheikh would refuse her nothing. As Gisèle realized the efficiency of the weapon sheer luck had placed in her hand, she felt a great hope fill her heart.

"Listen," she said, taking hold of Mustapha's burnous. "Am I to understand that thou art going to Si-Hamza with the *zmala* of Bou-Amel?"

The eunuch gave her a startled look and turned to Djeïlma for his cue. Letting her haïk fall on her shoulders, the Circassian awaited developments with tigerish quiet.

"The path to the left leads to the French," Gisèle went on. "It is the only one free from obstacles, and you are not going to take it?"

Mustapha was on the point of answering with brutality, when Djeïlma, whose eyes had darkened, made an imperious gesture.

"Wisdom sometimes comes from the lips of the maboul," she said. "The woman is mad. Let her speak!"

"Who would choose to double his risks?" Gisèle resumed. "If perchance Khaïd-Glawi lets you pass, it will be only because a fight has begun. The zmala may be plundered by the Ouled-Sidi-Sheiks ere Si-Hamza is told of your presence. Even if nothing as bad as this befalls you, you will to-morrow fall into French hands, since French troops are holding the pass, and Si-Hamza is pursued by General des Essarts. You cannot help being captured. Why should you take the additional chance of a fight?"

"But I know that Si-Hamza wants to surrender," Djeïlma interrupted. "If he intends to attack Bou-Amel, it is to earn the forgiveness of the Frenchmen."

"Art thou sure it is not to fulfil a vow he made in Figuig?"

"It is partly that. Si-Hamza very dearly loves Sidi d'Ornano and he is a friend of many French officers. For this reason the French will shun harsh measures. Moreover, they will need the Ouled-Sidi-Sheiks to go on with the war."

She seemed so sure of herself that Gisèle was unable to repress a smile. Djeïlma, as student of politics, was a revelation. Yet it was not so astonishing after all! The Circassian was of the kind who will steal whatever power they are denied, become a factor in politics in a land where politics are held to be so high above their sphere, and dare the worst where they have to fear the worst. It was not the first time that the French girl was struck by Djeïlma's keen insight into the human heart.

"But the French will insist upon avenging Sidi d'Orna-

no," she said, trying a new argument. "They will compel Si-Hamza to hand over the *zmala* of Bou-Amel."

Djeilma looked at her keenly.

"Thou art not so mad, after all," she admitted. "What is thy idea?"

"My idea is that Si-Hamza and the French will have every reason to thank and to treat well those who will rescue Sidi d'Ornano from certain death."

"So thou wouldst want us to go to the French camp with Sidi d'Ornano?"

"Yes."

"Thou art in love with Sidi d'Ornano?"

"Perhaps."

"Thou art no longer in love with Sidi Leïtoun?"

"Sidi Leïtoun is only my cousin. I treat him as a brother."

"Thou wilt never again interfere between me and Sidi Leïtoun?"

"Why should I?" she replied. "Sidi Leïtoun is a grown man; he can answer for himself."

"Then he must make me a picture of myself as I asked him. But there is something else. Wilt thou give me the gold snake I saw on thy arm the day of our flight from Marakesh?"

"I shall give it."

"And the pen which writes without ink?"

"The pen was Sidi d'Ornano's, and not mine."

"He will give it if it is thy wish. Will he protect me against Sidi-Malik? Shall I be free?"

"Why not ask that question of Sidi d'Ornano? He is himself my master."

"*M'leh kateer*. It shall be done. We will go on the French road and wait there for thy lover. I warn thee, he is very tired. He walked between two horses ever since this morning. Go now. I must think over this thing. Mustapha has Bou-Amel's seal. He will write the *karta* for the keepers of Sidi d'Ornano and he will give thee a *bassour*."

Less than three-quarters of an hour later, d'Ornano, led to a lonely spot, was lifted upon a horse. He at once went to sleep. He knew not what the outcome would be and did not care. For the last twelve hours a single thought had run through the circumvolutions of his brain: sleep if he could, die if he must. His strength was gone. His powers of perception were utterly blighted in the surging tide of his weariness; even his capacity for suffering had considerably decreased. During the sixty-five hours his torment had lasted, his keepers had been renewed ten times. All but two had made him walk the ground without cessation, pushing their horses right and left, and pulling on his arms, in opposite directions, whenever he staggered from fatigue or evinced a determination not to proceed a step further. All but two! These two had allowed him to speak to Djeilma and to lie down. But in his present state of torpor he was unaware of the fact that the same men were now leading him southwards.

He awoke under the hands of two husky negro servants who massaged his weary limbs with cinnamon oil. After they had dressed him, a cup of very strong coffee was given him. He drank at a gulp the hot beverage. Then the two men took him by the ankles and shoulders and lifted

him. He caught sight of a kneeling camel harnessed with a bassour. A second later, ushered into a darkness pungent with the perfumes of benjoin and rose-water, he found himself behind closed curtains, his head upon a woman's lap.

The sense of danger and the instinct of self-preservation, which extreme weariness had overcome, returned at the same instant, and he struggled against an overwhelming inclination to go back to sleep. The fighting instinct, dulled by exhaustion, had returned with its keen edge, and with it the power of perception and the faculty of thinking. Slowly he emerged from the deep waters of forgetfulness.

He had not understood yet; and the sensation of suspense was not unpleasant. Obviously, something beyond belief had taken place. He had seen the stars, the camels, a bassour. That he was now lying upon silk cushions with his head on somebody's knees was evident beyond a doubt. He was alive; that much was established. He was alive; but how and why?

He had no sooner made sure that he was in the company of a woman than he knew the woman. It was Djeilma who had arranged to meet him twenty-four hours before. The connection between the interview and the leniency shown afterwards by his keepers he could not overlook. He rejected as preposterous the idea that anybody but himself and Djeilma might now be in the bassour. The woman who could manage to conceal in her own palanquin the sworn foe of her lord and master could be trusted to keep the would-be eavesdroppers at a distance. He called aloud:

"Djeilma! Woman, art thou not Djeilma?"

"Allah Kerim! Art thou awake, Sidi?" came the startled answer. "How didst thou know it was Djeilma?"

"And whom could it be, woman-child—Bebée Miriam?"

"It might be the cousin of Sidi Leïtoun."

D'Ornano was too tired to busy himself with puzzles. He passed this one over without comment.

"Where are we now?" he inquired. "Where are we going?"

Immediately he felt a small finger on his lips. The Circassian bent over him and whispered in his ear, almost with a laugh, he thought:

"Hush! we go to Si-Hamza."

"To Si-Hamza? Why? Where is Si-Hamza?"

"Speak lower, Sidi. He is in hiding in the forest of Nesmote. I learned from one of his spies that it was his intention to attack Bou-Amel to-night."

"And why should he attack him?"

"*Manarf*, Sidi. I am not in his heart. He took the oath on thy account and struck Bou-Amel, remember. Now that the battle of Mascara has been lost because Bou-Amel did not do as he was told, he has two revenges to take. And I will help him, Inshallah!"

Her tone was so emphatic that d'Ornano laughed. "How wilt thou help him?" he asked.

"Allah Kerim! Do I not go with Bou-Amel's *zmala*, and do I not take thee with me?" she retorted. "Who could wish for more? How I hate that one-eyed man from the sands and all his camel-riders! Hearken, Sidi!" She raised her round arm solemnly. "I bear witness that whoever brings me his head I shall take for a lover.

Should that man be even the brother of Satan, the stoned, yet I swear I should take him."

"But what is to become of Sidi Leïtoun and Si-Hamza, in that case?" inquired d'Ornano, laughing again.

"Sidi Leïtoun! . . . Oh, Sidi Leïtoun is a fool!" she exclaimed in utter contempt. "If he makes my picture, I shall be well content to leave him alone. I only wanted to spite his French cousin."

"But why spite his French cousin?"

"A week after we left Marakesh, I asked her to give me a pen that writes without ink. She refused because it was thine," she said. "But behold! To-morrow I will make her give me a gold snake. There is not another like it in all the *soukhs* in Marakesh."

"Did she promise the gold snake?"

Djeilma hesitated. "No," she said, unwilling to let the cat out. "But do I not take thee to her?"

"But suppose she does not consider that I am worth a gold snake?"

"She does."

"How dost thou know? And suppose I don't allow the exchange?"

He came very near choking as he noticed the change of expression on her face. But he suddenly sobered as she gave him to understand, in no equivocal terms, that he, d'Ornano, might perhaps secure the head of Bou-Amel and thus be entitled to claim the reward. That he was at the same time expected to press his suit was made equally plain. Evidently the prospect of stealing a last march on the French cousin was not of a nature to displease the Circasian. To put an end to the ridiculous scene, he declared

that, far from making opposition to the transfer of the gold snake, he would even go to the length of presenting her with a duplicate of the fountain pen which had precipitated the trouble. This was so unexpected that Djeilma clapped her hands in childish glee.

"Indeed, thou art a man, Sidi d'Ornano!" she exclaimed. "Now I shall tell thee the truth. We are not going to Si-Hamza."

"Then whither do we go?"

"To thine own camp, Bismillah! But listen; this is not all. I shall give thee three guesses. Whom dost thou suppose came to ask me to rescue thee, to-night?"

"Sidi-Malik?"

"No."

"Sidi Leïtoun?"

"No, Sidi."

"Then Si-Hamza sent his spies, unless Capo di Borgo left the farm with some of my men?"

"No, Sidi; no, Sidi," and she almost screamed, so amused that she again clapped her hands. "This makes four guesses, and I gave thee only three. What a man thou art, Allah Kerim! I never yet found the man who took women into account. Was it a man who rescued Sidi Leïtoun?"

She opened the curtains and shouted to the negro driver to stop. As soon as the animal had kneeled, she let herself slide down. D'Ornano was left alone in the darkness. Then a feminine form obscured the opening between the curtains.

"Are you awake, Monsieur d'Ornano?"

The question had been put in French. Laboring under

the impression that it was Djeïlma coming back, d'Ornano wondered if, by any chance, an hallucination born of his state of torpor caused him to hear Gisèle's voice at such a time and at such a place. Thinking from his silence that he had again succumbed to weariness, the young woman opened the curtain wide. As she did so, the haïk fell on her shoulders.

Doubt was no longer possible. It was Gisèle to whom he owed life and freedom. Too moved to speak, d'Ornano caught the young woman by the wrist and drew her into the *bassour*. No sooner had the camel felt that the new passenger had taken her seat than he got up of his own accord.

The Corsican raised the wrist of his captive to his lips. Gisèle made a short-lived attempt at freeing herself. As his grip only tightened, she had recourse to dignified speech.

"If I am to travel with you, it is on the condition that you will remember that a man as tired as you are must obey the orders of his nurse," she said. "You must lie down and go to sleep."

"Thank you for reminding me," he replied with a gravity equal to her own. I trust you have not forgotten all the nursery rhymes you used to know. But, if you allow me, I would rather rid myself of the apologies I have been accumulating the last sixty hours."

"You may; but be quick!"

"In the first place, I would like you to be sure that I am awfully sorry for having shown you so much brutality this morning."

"I knew you could not help it."

"You are mocking me. But I had to go, and I could not stop long enough to convince you that my duty was plain. Moreover, nothing I could have said on the subject would have been conclusive. But I might have spared you the humiliation. Will you believe me when I tell you that it was not false pride which prevented me from asking you sooner to——"

She interrupted, laughing. "Don't tell me. I shall never believe it."

"Why? In all seriousness, I assure you that I could not bring myself to speak. Is it then so impossible?"

"Not at all. May I ask what made you find your tongue?"

"I don't know if you will pardon me for saying it. It seems that you took the lead in the matter?"

"I had to, Monsieur d'Ornano."

"I admit it."

"And that does not put you to shame?"

"I am afraid it does."

"Then you are no longer frightened?"

"I am not."

"And you cradled yourself in the belief that I would do without my proposal?"

"What do you mean?"

"Oh yes, you may well begin to shake. It strikes me that you are sorely in need of rhetorical training, Monsieur d'Ornano. As I must make sure beforehand that I shall not be compelled to wait at the church, you will oblige me by presently twisting your thoughts into a decent declaration of your feelings."

"But . . ."

"No, but. . . . If you cannot find anything original, I shall sentence you to repeat my own words. You will be sorry. It will teach you the one thing you refuse to learn; and that's laughing at yourself."

Until now she had been sitting on the edge of the bassour. But at this stage, feeling somewhat uncomfortable, she changed her position and closed the curtains. It was the thought that she could not now see him and laugh at his grimace which decided d'Ornano. He happened also to remember that there had been a time when proposal had been spelled *Rapt* in big letters. The original spelling was much more acceptable to his character; and, moreover, there was a chance that, by taking Gisèle in his arms, he would evince greater powers of persuasion.

"My dear," he said, "you were given to me. You say that I have to ask your permission to keep you. But you will kindly remember that your father's last words were to warn me against letting you 'fall into the hands of these scoundrels.' What if I take the position that all the men are scoundrels?"

"Do you call this a proposal?" she laughed. "*Au temps! C'est trop mou*, as you say in the military. You will please begin all over again. . . . Hush! What is this? What are they screaming about?"

The caravan had come to a sudden stop. Opening the curtain, d'Ornano put his head out. They were in the very heart of the pass. A hundred feet ahead, gleaming in the darkness, he saw the bayonets of his soldiers. He reëntered the bassour.

"My men," he said. "But I have yet time to ask and be granted forgiveness. I told you this morning that I

loved you, Gisèle; and you have long ago reached your conclusions about it. Will it be my wife that I shall take to Corsica this summer?"

"Yes," she replied, "as soon as I have sewn on your sleeve the *galon* of a lieutenant-colonel."

CHAPTER XXXII

SIDI-MALIK COMES INTO HIS OWN

Terror and confusion had Bou-Amel's followers by the throat. With Si-Hamza's first charge, the discovery was made that the chieftain was no longer in his tent. Shortly afterwards it became known that the zmala was also missing. The suspicion that the Maddhi had fled, leaving his troops to defend themselves as best they could, was spread by the chiefs themselves who, now unrestrained in their personal ambition, clashed with each other in a wild scramble for leadership. There had never existed, in this army, more than a semblance of discipline. It went with Bou-Amel. Khaïd-el-Goundafi attempted in vain to impose his authority upon Khaïd-Glawi. The people of Wad Nun and Wadi Draa refused with indignation to recognize in either of them the Maddhi's coadjutor. The Saharan sheikhs, acting without concert, and thinking of little beyond saving their own goods, thwarted each other's efforts at reëstablishing order. Twice a half-hearted attempt to force the pass and escape by the Frenda road was made by Khaïd-Glawi. It came to naught before the fire of the French. Tribal chief after tribal chief passed over to Si-Hamza. Three of the chieftain's sons, delivered by transfuges into the victor's hands,

were immediately turned over to the executioner. Si-Hamza had not expected strong resistance; but he met so little that no excuse for great slaughter was left him. The spirit of the Saharans gave way of a sudden as is always the case with such hosts. Magnificent in the onslaught, an unmatched soldier as long as he believes himself to be the sword of his God, the Moslem is unable to stem the tide of defeat and will lose all in a moment of panic fear. Of Bou-Amel's great army, nothing remained when dawn came. The crowd that was left in its place was on its knees, too glad to be plundered, begging only for life at the feet of the victor.

Bou-Amel had fled at the first attack. With a few trusted men, he followed for an hour the windings of a mountain path, unaware that Sidi-Malik, Muhamed-ben-Khadour and twenty others were on his tracks. The camel-driver and his companions fell on them as they stopped to consider whether they should flee towards Saïda or towards Tiaret.

The sun was already high when Sidi-Malik, Bou-Amel's headless body dragging at his horse's tail, reached the pass of Aïn-Guergour. He found the farm deserted. The French troop had removed to healthier quarters, a mile and a half nearer Cacherou, at the other extremity of the pass. Thither Sidi-Malik turned his horse. Khaïd-Mokrani, sent by Si-Hamza to inform d'Ornano that his chief would soon make his appearance, had come back with Leyton, ready to surrender with all his men. The Corsican had lined the road on both sides with his troops. He now watched a ceaseless flow of horsemen who threw their weapons down as they passed by.

The spectacular appearance of Sidi-Malik on the scene created all the stir the camel-driver had anticipated and more. But none were as powerfully impressed as Djeïlma, and certainly none evinced at the same time so much admiration and so much fear.

Like a queen of Sheba, surrounded by a crowd of negro servants, eunuchs, *arifas*, camel-drivers, frightened children and weeping females, the Circassian was deep in conversation with Gisèle and the painter. Her milk-white camel, the proudest of a hundred animals of Filali breed, was in a kneeling position. She reclined in her bassour. Unveiled, in the scant array of gorgeous gauzes and filmy silks, as white as a pearl in the setting of multicolored cushions, she kept a studied attitude. She had taken precious care that the bassour's curtains should be wide open so that nobody, not even the French soldiers, could doubt that she surpassed in attractiveness the Frenchwoman with whom she was conversing. The intent was so obvious that Gisèle almost regretted having again resumed the garments of the hospital nurse. It was in the midst of this display of barbaric splendor that Sidi-Malik made his startling reappearance. Horsemen in brilliant costume came trotting singly, throwing down their weapons and riding by with unabated pride and dignity of bearing. Negro servants, glad of an event which would give freedom to those who had been held in slavery, were singing in chorus. Hysterical females were weeping, in turns entreating and cursing the French soldiers. A strange blend of Arabic perfumes, mingled with the scents of horses, camels and heated wool, permeated the atmosphere. The macadamized road was painfully white in the June heat.

The blue-gray agaves that bordered it shot blossoming poles high in the deep cobalt of the sky. As proud as Don Cæsar de Bazan, Sidi-Malik came trotting along, dragging in the dust the body of Bou-Amel.

Djeilma, who was facing the road, saw him first. Leyton, then listening to Gisèle, had not noticed the sudden silence which had fallen over the crowd. But he saw the Circassian's mobile features at first express surprise, then abject fear. She did not utter a sound; but he saw the dread of death fill her dilated pupils. He turned sharply and not a minute too soon. Sidi-Malik had already jumped from his horse. His flissa in his hand, he was now running towards the bassour.

Leyton received the impact. Happily his hands were free. He managed to seize the camel-driver by the throat, succeeding at the same time in catching hold of his right arm. But he nearly lost his balance. Then remembering what a wrestler his opponent was, he called for help, knowing that if the struggle was protracted he would be pushed against the camel and thrown down. And Sidi-Malik was capable of murdering Djeilma over him. He yelled to Gisèle:

"Tell d'Ornano! Quick, for God's sake! *Ya Mokrani! Aroua mena Mokrani.*"

The old khaïd was not slow in answering the call. Twisting Sidi-Malik's wrist with both hands, he compelled him to relax the hold he had on his flissa. This done, he caught him by the shoulders, struck him in the loins with his knee and doubled him over. A blow on the chin completed the camel-driver's collapse. When Jarchin and d'Ornano reached the place, they found

Leyton sitting on the chest of his prostrate adversary. The painter got up, thinking that there were now enough of them to hold Sidi-Malik in check. Released, the fallen man did not even attempt to move. The sudden fear of having hurt him smote Leyton; but d'Ornano knew better.

"Get up, *beni-kelb*!" he ordered sternly. "I will have no murders in my camp, understand. In consideration of thy services, thou wilt this time go free. But the next attempt means a blindfold, a cactus hedge and twelve bullets. Get up and get out."

Sidi-Malik got up and, to everybody's surprise, began to sob. He pushed Mokrani aside, ran to his horse and came back in a minute. Then, savagely brandishing Bou-Amel's head, he threw it into the *bassour*.

Djeilma received it on her knees and screamed, wild with terror. Sidi-Malik spat at d'Ornano's feet.

"I go now," he declared impressively. "Inshallah! I have learned to despise the *Rumis*. Who saved thy life in Marakesh, Sidi d'Ornano? Who led thee across the desert? Who went in quest of thee last night? Shall I after all this, be threatened with death, be sat upon and be called a *beni-kelb*?"

D'Ornano softened at once.

"The *beni-kelb* was not for the friend," he replied, "but for the murderer. The man who saved my life can have all that is mine. But I cannot harbor murderers in my camp."

"*Bono bezef*, Sidi. I shall wait until she leaves then. Has she not been unfaithful to me? Whose fault is it if I am *meskeen* now—if I have lost all that was mine?"

Whose fault is it if I suffered the torment of salt? Did she not come near causing the death of Sidi Leïtoun, Akh Arbi? Is she not herself a murderer. Where are thy bullets, then? Allah Kerim, why should I be deprived of my revenge?"

"Because it is enough to come here with Bou-Amel's head. Besides, she saved my life last night."

Sidi-Malik looked at Leyton for confirmation of the incredible news. Plainly he was disturbed. In a few words, the painter told him the story of d'Ornano's escape.

"But why did she save him?" he questioned.

Leyton smiled and shrugged his shoulders. "Ask Djeïlma," he said.

Sidi-Malik did not ask. Instead, he made the survey of the surroundings. The camels made the first claim on his attention, then the eunuchs. After that he lost himself in the contemplation of Djeïlma's jewels. He saw a great light.

"Was she captured or did she leave Bou-Amel's camp before the fight?" he asked again.

"She came here with Sidi d'Ornano before the fight."

There was a silence. Sidi-Malik was thinking.

"Sidi d'Ornano," he resumed suddenly, "I cannot be made a khaïd if I commit murder, can I?"

"Of course not," the Corsican replied. "But why a khaïd? I thought it was thy ambition to become chief of the native police in Marakesh?"

"I want to be made a khaïd."

"For what reason?"

"As a chief of the native police, the Jews of Marakesh will always be complaining to the Sidi Governor that I

have robbed them of their goods. If I become a khaïd, Si-Hamza will protect me."

"Good Heavens, man!" d'Ornano exclaimed. "Did it, by any chance, enter thy head that thou couldst be made a khaïd among the Ouled-Sidi-Sheiks?"

"Yes, Sidi."

"A Berber lording it over Arabs of great tent; a Philistine master in Jerusalem! *Maboul enta*, Sidi-Malik?"

"No, Sidi, I am not crazy."

"But the khaïds of the Ouled-Sidi-Sheiks are all descendants of the Prophet. Si-Hamza may be a friend, but he will never, for thy sake, go against the will of his people."

"He will, Sidi. I will make him."

"Still even he could not obtain for thee the consent of the officers of the *Bureau Arabe*."

"But nothing is impossible to thee, Sidi d'Ornano. Will not the French soon make thee a lieutenant-colonel? Thou wilt remember that I brought thee the head of Captain Monnier's and Captain Trafaeli's murderer."

The argument was so irresistible that d'Ornano laughed. Again Sidi-Malik looked at Djeilma. To-day the camel-driver's thoughts were decidedly interesting.

"Will Djeilma be allowed to leave thy camp with all her goods?" he inquired.

"She will. She can go whenever she pleases."

"Revenge is a duty of the Bled-es-Sibla," resumed Sidi-Malik, who appeared lost in speculation. "All of you know that I speak the truth."

D'Ornano nodded. Better than anybody present, he understood the duty incumbent upon the man.

"But a Berber can take blood money instead of revenge," continued the camel-driver tentatively.

"I know that."

"*M'leh kateer, Akh Arbi!* Thou speakest good. Let Djeilma repay me for my losses, and I will give her the *aman*, the *mezrag* and the *anaïa*."

Again d'Ornano laughed. "Wilt thou let her go free?" he asked, also tentatively.

But Sidi-Malik flared up in indignation.

"Free?" he exploded. "Free? . . . No, Sidi. She would buy freedom with the very apples of her eyes. Who but Franzawi fools would let a woman go about freely. If I went away now and came back in five minutes, I would find her dancing before thy soldiers. Free? *Macash!*"

"Then thou wilt take her back and give her the *anaïa*?"

"I will take her back with all her goods. Yes, Sidi."

"But what will Djeilma have to say?" laughed Gisèle. "She might at least be consulted. Is this a divorce court or a horse market?"

"Oh, Djeilma will not mind," replied d'Ornano. She told me last night that whoever brought her Bou-Amel's head she would take for a lover, even if he was the brother of Satan, the stoned. Don't you think Sidi-Malik is ugly enough for any devil?"

"But Sidi-Malik won't keep her."

Her glance interrogated the camel-driver. Sidi-Malik declared with serene impudence:

"I shall give her to Si-Hamza. Thus shall I become a *khaïd* among the Ouled-Sidi-Sheiks."

“And it will be right, Inshallah!” snapped the Circasian. “Si-Hamza will take me to Paris, and I shall wear French hats, like the cousin of Sidi Leïtoun.”

THE END





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